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The Shaman That Can't Become A Hero

Arc 2: Pig

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Table of Contents

[The Shaman That Can't Become A Hero](#)

[Chapter 7: First time Spleunking](#)

[Chapter 8: Encounter part.1](#)

[Chapter 9: Encounter part.2](#)

[Chapter 10: Futaba Meiko part.1](#)

[Chapter 11: Futaba Meiko part.2](#)

[Chapter 12: Futaba Meiko part.3](#)

[Chapter 13: Shaman and Pig](#)

[Chapter 14: Hero and Saint](#)

[Author's Q&A: Act.2](#)

Chapter 7: First time Spleunking

"A-ah... I'm sorry, please don't do anything painful, please."

Right now, I'm in full blown begging-for-my-life mode. I hope you don't see this as shameful though.

"Momokawa Kotarou. To have met again, we are thus glad."

I face the Grim Reapershinigami, or rather, the God who bestowed me with the oh-so-wonderful vocation of shaman, Curse God Ruinhilde. A skeleton body similar to the one you could find in the biology lab, he unleashes a fierce, indomitable presence.

Not only is that skull face in the worn out black robe super scary, I also had painful experiences with him like having my head messed with and chest pierced. So, obviously, with no half-baked-ness, I'd up and start begging for mercy.

"Umm... Have I perhaps, done something wrong?"

Please spare me from unfair scoldings like, Pathetic, to be done in by some DQN despite being a shaman. As I can't really reply to a literal God with, Then why don't you just give me some super strong Curse to make Higuchi suffer and die, huh.

Thine grudge, it doth taste rather sweet, we praise thou.

It seems he's not angry for that event, but rather seems happy. Whew, I'm relieved from the bottom of my heart. I can't even imagine what this God'd do to me if I made him mad.

"Yes, it was my pleasure. Then, why have I been called here, if I may inquire?"

I'd suddenly woken up, to find myself in this God's space. Though in pitch darkness, strangely, you can see each other and the surroundings. Like outer space scenes in Sci-Fi movies.

I was in the fairy square, testing out various mixtures of herbs, but seems like my fatigue had built up and I'd dozed off.

That's a safe area not approached by any monsters, so sleeping there wouldn't be a problem. I hope nothing attacks my immobile, defenseless body lying there on the flower garden. No, not in the sexual meaning, the predatory one.

"We shalt grant thee, a novel Curse."

"Eh!? You will! Thankyou very much!"

An unexpected level-up. I guess the beating the Armor Bear must have gotten me a heap of exp. I mean, that thing has to be at least mid-boss tier. If you got that guy as you first encounter in a game, that would be a game-breaking bug.

Whatever it is, if I can get a new move, I'll thankfully accept. If possible, something that can directly damage monsters. Please, God.

"Recieveth it well."

With such majestic phrasing, Ruinhilde's arm moves. Um, feel like I've seen this bef-when that bad feeling had raced through my body, the bony right hand was already gripping my head. More specifically, it was gripping my slightly long black hair.

"U uwaAAa! Again-gUFuoAAAAaa!?"

While I was crying out, he had spear handed me right in the middle of the belly. My hard-abs-less squishy abdomen offered not the slightest resistance, and let the sharp fingertips pass through all too easily.

"Begrudge, envy, but stops not thine legs. Indeed, doth thou possess the aptness of a Shaman. We expect much, young devotee, Momokawa Kotarou."

Ruinhilde was rattling his skull face saying something, but I didn't have a moment, even a speck of time to listen to God's words. Actually, my consciousness is already... Ah, damn, what is this nightmare...

"Alright, got myself a new blessing, made lots of meds too, time to head out!"

I'd received the blessing like one of those splatter films, and was a bit depressed, so tried to get myself riled up even if forcefully. I mean, if I don't then I'd never have the guts to step into that dark passage AKA 'underground labyrinth dungeon'.

"H-headin' oouut..."

In the end, with terrified-witless steps, I really began my dungeon spelunking.

The thin rubber soles of my indoor shoes clearly transmitted the feeling of stone underfoot. The fairy square seemed like a neatly cut off nature park, right after which, the passage was made in stone only, like the stairway.

However, those gray walls were rough, covered in mosses, and had large cracks running along them. Breaking through the gaps in the stone, unknown weeds sprouted everywhere.

Intuition Pharmacy was like, "Weeds with no effect at all. Worthless. They should just go extinct.", and dishing out some sick burns-cum-explanations in my head. Was it always this kind of power?

Though these weeds were growing so happily, there's no mistaking that this place was deep underground where the sun's light doesn't reach.

The light here, is of course that same magic white light. However, the space between these luminescent magic tiles was sparse, and the light didn't reach each and every corner of the of the passage. From the edges of areas shrouded in darkness, I felt like I saw some big bugs crawling about.

"Ha,ahaha... no way, can't be a cockro-"

Another rustle as I swallow my breath. The shadow reflected in my vision for an instant, looked nothing but like that reddish brown thing that's hated unilaterally all across Japan.

I'm not that bad with insects, and won't hesitate to smash that with a rolled up newspaper. Nevertheless, if it gets to palm sized, it's no good. Something, many things are no good. That's not something humans can handle. We'll go into decline.

Shivering in such thoughts, I just quickly keep walking through the passage without checking left, right or back. Fortunately, I stopped hearing any of the creepy noises that makes. Fuu~ as I breath a sincere sigh of relief, my feet stop.

"Fork in the road... no, looks like a main road."

At the end of the passage, appeared a large open area. On the ceiling high up,

I see the large type luminescent tiles which light up the present scenery. And also, paths that could hold 2 lanes of cars, splitting in front of me.

"Kinda, looks like long tunnels."

Though their semi-circular ceilings were orange in color though, there isn't a sodium bulb in sight. Looking left or right, the road, slightly curves until it melds into the darkness. It felt like a subway train could come out from there any second.

"I'll go... right."

I'd opened the magic notebook to check the compass. The arrow on the dimly glowing white magic circle did in fact indicate towards the right-hand-side road. Not shaking or wavering, pointed stiff.

I, having nothing else to rely on, kept on walking where the arrow so confidently indicated with no particular doubts.

"This thing, isn't broken or anything, right?"

When it isn't changing at all thirty minutes into walking in the tunnel, naturally, those kinds of doubts would surface. Every time I check the notebook, the arrow's still just pointing forward.

I needlessly doubt it for a few more dozens of minutes. The arrow shifts direction.

"Uaa... is this was really ok?"

The arrow pointed straight at the back of a wall that was crumbling, revealing a narrow passage. Without a doubt, that doesn't look like it was made along with this tunnel, but by someone else who drilled a hole to the other side.

Along the way here, I'd seen similar places with the wall crumbled, but if you tell me to go into one, I'd be a little hesitant.

Well, no use worrying. This must work as a shortcut, with such positive thoughts, I slide myself into the large crack in the wall.

And inside, there was a passage just like the one I entered in from, from the fairy square. So similar, I was beginning to doubt, this dungeon consisted of only these tunnel and dim passage type paths.

For now, without expecting any spectacular fantasy-esque scenery, I started walking on when,

"-Dagoaa!"

I heard a voice.

"Who's... no, not a person..."

At first, I thought it could be a classmate shouting. But, that voice didn't sound Japanese at all, it was a jarring cry impossible to comprehend. Could be someone from this world speaking its language, but the roughness of it, could be some beast as well.

"...looks like it's from that room."

The voice had come from a door midway through this straight passage. Seemed like the inside of the room was brighter than in here, and white light was seeping in through the slightly opened door. It was just the right gap to peek through.

This could even be a new monster following the Armor Bear. If it finds me, I have no countermeasures at all. The new Curse I got from Curse God Ruinhilde is, unfortunately, not the offensive kind.

Though I feared it dangerous, that didn't stop me from checking what lay inside that room. I got curious, I got super curious about it. Really, if there's a new monster, I at least want to confirm what it looks like. I could get some valuable insights too.

Feeling my rapidly rising heartbeat, I kill the sound of my footsteps, and stealthily approach the door. The indecipherable cry reaching my ears get progressively louder. I get the image of that wood-like door being kicked open and the owner of that cry jumping out, in my head, as I finally reach the door.

I hold my breath, and slowly, peer into the gap-

"--!?"

Not a shout, not a sound of surprise. That I didn't do either of those could be said to be nothing but miraculous. Because, what I saw beyond the door, broke past my imagination.

"They're eating... human..."

I only said that in my head. Eating human flesh. If I had to say it in words, those would match what I was seeing.

It was a stone room with no peculiar features. The size would be about half of a class room. Diagonally at the edge of the room from the door I was peeking from, were 3 shadows.

No, those were really only black in color. Those bodies glistening black under the white light as if smeared in oil, gave me the same aversion as when I saw those cockroaches. But they, standing on two legs, holding things with their two hands, wearing worn and torn clothing, seemed much closer to humans than any roach.

Nevertheless, no one has to convince me that those 3 black things are not human at all. Eating a person, with just that one point, I refuse to acknowledge them as human.

"huff... huf.... What the hell, is that monster..."

At the back of the room, those three are gathered around something-no, I already recognized what that was. Lying there was unmistakably, a girl from my class. In the middle of that red-black pool of blood, I spotted the familiar deep-blue sailor uniform. From that pleated skirt, the legs peeking out shone strangely white.

Though I could see so clearly, I didn't know that girl's name. Because I can't see her face. From my position I could only see the back of the head, with black shoulder length hair-just the back of the head, disconnected to the body, rolling on the floor.

To add, it was not only her head, but both arms were missing from her body too. Right arm from the shoulder, and left, from the elbow, had been cut away.

Grunch, grunch, resounds the vulgar sound of mastication. The missing arms were each in the possession of one of the black ones who were in the middle of gnawing at those white slender fingertips.

"Ugh...uu..."

The contents of my stomach were flowing back up, but I managed to swallow it down. I wonder if I got some resistance from watching all those zombie flicks with Masaru that had nothing but the gore going for them.

Still, no masterpiece of horror filmography can hope to accomplish what this undoubtedly real scene presented in cruelty, frustration, discomfort, disgust... ah, I feel sick, so sick... a feeling, nothing but, sick.

I look at the black thing's face as it chews the middle finger of the right hand. A face uglier than even zombies.

Its piercing round, yellow eyeballs stand out from the pitch-black skin. Though they seem to glitter in the light, it's unlike the shine of gold, but rather like the yolk of a rotten egg.

Its nose at the center of its face was short as if smashed in. Maybe human meat is just that good, or perhaps is it eating a girl that got them excited, I don't even want to know. But seeing that rough breathing through its nostrils, it sure gave that kind of impression.

Most of all, its mouth, wholeheartedly indulging in the white finger with no thought of wiping off the dripping blood, gave me the worst disgust. A big mouth deviating from the meaning of that expression. Its mouth stretched up to the middle of its cheeks. From that large oral cavity peeked out white and yellow filthy, uneven teeth, and a strangely long red tongue. Its teeth tore away at the finger meat, like a leech, not spilling a single drop of blood, then licking the meatless finger bones.

It's unbearable to look at, but those two eating just the hands were still better. Much better than the other one. Lifting up the hem of the sailor uniform, it was excitedly shoving its face into the slender, white, naked belly underneath. Shoved it right in the middle where you'd find the navel. It was slurping out her intestines from there and devouring them. Even though it had its two hands, it still ate like a stray dog eating from a trash can. Despite its human form, its filthy dining wouldn't be seen in even monkeys.

"Huff... huff... g-gotta get out of-!?"

"Guuara!"

Suddenly, one of them raised a shrill cry. Throwing aside the half-eaten right arm, it grabbed the rusted axe hanging by its waist, and turned around. Yes, it turned around right towards the door I'm peeking from.

Crap, they found me-

"DegyeEEE!"

Or so I'd've thought, but it turned back round right there. Seems like, it hadn't actually noticed me.

The hell man, fuck you, scaring me like that. As I was cursing them in my heart,

Chok! a dull sound reverberated throughout the room. What is that-before I question the sound, that things action burns into my eyes.

It had swung down its axe at full power. Where? it's obvious. On her corpse. The target was the leg. At the base of the thigh.

Chok-chock, chek-chok. The sound of piercing meat repeats. I saw it madly striking repeatedly with the unsharpened, rusted blade. The part of the human body, next in thickness after the waist, was battered countless times by the unwieldy axe. Rather than being cleanly severed, it was raggedly being shaven into.

The girl's pale legs are drenched in blood and defiled in red cuts. The skirt, turned up from the violence, revealing a pair of prim light-blue underwear, only to be accentuated the graphicness of it all. I'd dream of staring at a girl's pantiespant-su, but that thing's vigorous axe thrashing, made it completely into a nightmare.

Yes, a nightmare. Being attacked by the Armor Bear, having my core stolen by Higuchi. That misfortune felt oh so warm. Right now I felt like the luckiest person in the world. I mean, I'm here, alive, and she's there, dead, being eaten. In all vulgarity and sloppiness, by those ugly, barbaric monsters, devoured to bits.

"GuveEE!"

Crkk, a different, larger sound reached my ears. It was undoubtedly the sound

on the femur being forcefully split after half of it had been chopped through. Then, finally it grabbed the chopped off leg with both hands, and sank its filthy wide mouth into the meaty thigh in ecstasy.

I unwillingly hear it going GueE or Buhea as if it's satisfied with the dish it's gorging on.

"No... no... just, enough already..."

The two others, as if provoked by the one ravishing its leg, started wildly fighting over the half-eaten thigh in that one's hands. At that juncture, I'd had enough, and slowly backed away with my trembling feet.

That's enough insight. Much more than enough. I understand that this dungeon has demons that'll happily devour human flesh.

From their hairless, slimier than smooth, bald head, with two short protrusions like a deformed snail shell sticking out, I'd be right in calling them demons.

"I have to get out... absolutely, no matter what... from this hell"

With unabated fear rising from deep in my heart, I rapidly advance through the dark passage.

Chapter 8: Encounter part.1

"Yay! a fairy square!"

Seeing the only bright, peaceful place in this dark, gloomy dungeon I, like a rising highschool player reaching home base at Koushien, slid right into the room.

The fairy square gave me a feeling as if I'd returned back to where I left from. The neatly spaced trees of fairy walnut, the medicinal flower garden in full bloom. Finally, the save-point-like fountain with the cute fairy statue. Water, food, medicine, I could get them all right here.

But, what I needed the most was the sense of security of the fairy square, where monsters don't approach. Obviously, because I came to know, how that kind of violent, man-eating demon runs rampant in this dungeon.

Looking back, those things had clothing, and used weapons such as the axe. One could see an intelligence greater than monkeys but less than men. In RPG terms, they gave the image of Goblins or Ghouls. In a game they'd be beginner level mobs used for grinding exp, but seeing something like that in real life only gave me fear and panic. There's likely more of those than the three I saw. Implying, this dungeon, is literally teeming with them.

I should... just live here from now...

Like an office workersalaryman who'd just been laid off, I was sitting at the edge of the fountain, head down, mumbling these heart broken words. Rather than continuing this dangerous dungeon exploration, god knows when the next safe location will be, I ended up genuinely thinking I should just stay put here.

No, I get it. I know doing that isn't possible. But, at least, I can't really jump into that abyss right now-

"Nn... uu..."

I feel like I heard a groan. It's not a sound I myself leaked out along with some auspicious sigh.

"Hu-Who's there!?"

My first reaction was wary. I won't be smiling like an idiot when meeting a classmate anymore. It got a bit hazy because of that gory scene from before, but Higuchi's loathsome grin instantly flashes back into mind.

Only three can escape from here. Having been betrayed by my best friend, I know there won't be anyone capricious enough to let me in their group, if only to make up numbers. To add, my vocation is that of shaman. You can't rely on me in fights either.

"I... know you're there, show yourself."

With my shaky hands, I take out my boxcutter and fully unretracted, and repeat the Curse incantations in my head countless times. With 'Red Fever' and my newly received Curse, I should be able to hold them off somewhat. It's better than doing nothing, is my general feeling.

"Come out dammit!"

My already shrill voice, becoming even more soprano from the tenseness, echoes pitifully in the fairy square-but, the other party hasn't made a single reply.

If they're hiding, I'll just have to find them. That being said, I already know what places a person could hide in this room.

I glance at the trees lined up on both sides of the room but, nope, you can't completely hide yourself behind those. I don't see anyone there.

That being the case, there's only one more place. That is, right behind the fountain I'm standing in front of. If you lie sprawled out on the opposite side, you'd be completely out of my visual range.

I prepare myself, and sneakily begin tip-toeing around the fountain. Only the splashing sounds of flowing water hits my ears. The moment of truth, to be revealed in a matter of seconds. It's a small fountain in the first place, walking slowly, a round-trip wouldn't even take 30 seconds. Even less time if the distance is halved.

"- Ah!?"

Indeed, it was a classmate. Like the one I peeked at through that door just before, dressed in the same sailor uniform, a girl from class, lay there collapsed.

However, the impression was completely different. Compared to the unknown girl from before, the one in front of me right now lying pale was practically twice her size. The girl boasting such a large figure, there could only be but one.

"Futaba-san!"

Futaba Meiko. From the seat next to me, the big-bodied girl. But also someone whose body shook enough to not be able to draw the magic circle, a classically girlish, small-willed person. That girl, was lying there, paled blue.

I don't have any particularly special feelings for her, and when I handed her a copy of the magic circle in the classroom this morning, it was nothing but a whimsical act of small kindness. Honestly, that much of a relationship isn't enough to put my trust her. And right now, I need to be wary, first and foremost-but, I quickly ran over to her. Along with the boxcutter, I threw away my panic, wariness and steeled heart.

"Futaba-san, are you alright!"

Because she'd been injured. The first thing I notice is the redness of her abdomen under that blackened sailor uniform rolled up to the chest. The wound was, different from mine received from the Armor Bear, a straight slash across the belly, as if torn up with a knife.

The shirt was rolled up, not to invite men into attacking her, but to somehow treat the wound herself.

However, she didn't have the means to carry out any treatment of such a terrible wound. And that would lead to her present state.

"Ah... Mo, mokawa... kun..."

She thinly opened her round eyes, and saw me, who was calling out to her, by her side. Traces of tears on the edges of those eyes. How long had she cried in fear of being so close to death. Now, she didn't have the strength to even cry.

"Hold on, Futaba-san!"

"H... Help... me..."

"I will! I'll help you right now!"

"Don't... please don't... leave me... behind"

Leaving that, Futaba-san's eyelids were again, shut.

"Futaba-san!? Futaba-saaaaan!"

No reply. No reply, but she's still faintly breathing. I quickly decided to check her pulse. Reaching not for her wrist, but her pale neck. That was closer. As I touch, I'm surprised at the softness of a maiden's skin. Soft, white skin. But fat.

I'm damned tired of my male instincts rising first, but on my finger, I indeed feel her pulse.

Futaba Meiko, she's not out of the game yet.

"Please... work!"

With a prayer, I turn over my bag where I'd put the medicine I, as an amateur shaman, earnestly made at the first fairy square.

Fak-elionfalse dandelion and fairy walnut leaves ground together with the flowers that looked like white lily, I grab first grab the medicine named 'Ointment A'. Of course, there's a B and C made with other combinations of herbs. But, right now I don't give a damn.

Ointment A was stored in the tupperware from Takashima-kun's lunchbox that'd saved my life. And now it would be saving Futaba-san's life too, this miracle tupperware.

"Aa, umm, before applying I have to disinfect... no, don't have any disinfectant... no, no before that, I need to wash the wound itself, ah, I need to wash my hands too!?"

Paramedics would cry seeing this disorganized excuse for first aid.

First of all, I washed my hands in the fountain, grabbed the plastic bottle out of the contents of my upturned bag, and quickly twisted the cap. This was something I was carrying, the one half filled with an energy drink. By the first fairy square I'd already emptied it, and filled it with the water from the

fountain. In the end, I hadn't drunk a drop till reaching here, so it's filled to the very brim.

"E-excuse me..."

After apologizing for some reason, I reached my hand towards Futaba-san's plump belly. It didn't look erotic as it was covered in blood, but when touching, I felt an enticing warm softness from it. Bearing the urge to vigorously rub it, I used the water from the plastic bottle to rinse the wound, carefully so as not to widen the cut.

Though the blood was somewhat washed off, since some time has passed since the injury, some of the blood had hardened. At this rate, I wouldn't make any progress. After making the area clean enough, it was finally time for ointment A.

Fortunately, the cut wasn't deep enough that her guts would pop out. However, the horizontally running slash right below the navel was still bleeding out bit by bit. Death from blood loss would be the highest risk factor.

"It's ok... this should, this will work..."

I'd survived with the slight haemostasis-only effect of the fak-elion. This now greatly upgraded version, ointment A, will definitely make quick work of a smallfry wound like this. Believing that with my all, I grab some of the pasty, wild-grass-scented ointment from the tupperware, and smear it on Futaba-san's belly.

This should definitely stop the blood flowing out, but if it should have the opposite effect... No, let's not, I can't just worry about everything. Though I think that, when I see Futaba-san's blood-drained pale face, the word 'too late' inevitably comes to mind.

"Now... I can only pray, huh."

Using up half of the contents from the tupperware, I had nothing else. I had neither bandages, nor blood transfusion packs. To boot, there was no clean bed to quietly rest her on either. It's unfortunate, but she'd have to keep lying on the grass here.

"If this doesn't work... maybe I'll get cursed by Futaba-san..."

Chapter 9: Encounter part.2

Finishing up Futaba-san's emergency treatment, I decided to take a nap for the time being. Though it hadn't been long, quite a few things did happen, and I was genuinely fatigued. Just how many traumas does this day have in store for me? It's been one anxiety after another.

After that, not being aware how long, and not wanting to go to the trouble of restarting my powered down phone to check the time, I slept soundly till my body had its fill. It was on top of the grass but surprisingly comfortable. In addition, there wasn't an ever-so-pleasant dream with Curse God Ruinhilde making an appearance, so I'd woken up quite refreshed.

"Futaba-san... seems to be alright"

Her peaceful breathing reminded me of a Holstein taking a nap at a farm. No, not as in her boobs, but in the sense of her tranquil presence. The color in her face returned somewhat, she was resting calmly.

Nevertheless, her defenceless posture lying before me does in fact incite an urge to squeeze. We'll, there's no way a loser like me'll actually do anything. Well naturally, since I'm but a lowly virgin boy whose age equalled exactly the amount of time he hasn't been with a girlfriend.

"Sigh... I'll make more meds"

Since I'm still not feeling up to dungeon crawling, I started remixing more of Ointment A to replenish the portion used up.

To be honest, if you just knew the effect of the herbs with Intuition Pharmacy, you didn't need to be a shaman to actually make these ointments. There was no game-like convenience of casting some magic and getting the desired item. Basically, you had to collect the herbs and diligently grind them with your own two hands.

I work at the process single-mindedly, with the regular flow of water from the fountain as BGM. I take a branch from a Fairy Walnut tree as a pestle, and a convenience store plastic bag (small) I discovered deep in my bag, as a mortar,

finally throwing in a mix of ingredients eyeing out the amount of each.

We take leaves from the Fake-elionfalse dandelion, and Fairy Walnuts, but as for this white-lily-like flower— umm, let's just call them White Blooms— we need not the leaves nor the petals, but the nectar inside, which has medicinal effects. Since I don't have any way to properly wring out the honey, I can only tear off the petals and throw in the ones that seem to secrete nectar. I worried if this rough method would be effective, but Intuition Pharmacy whispered "It's fine, It's fine", in my head, so I decided that it was.

Anywho, in that manner, I had made more Ointment A, the thing that seemingly healed Futaba-san, proving its great efficacy. With this, there's much less danger from quite a few types of injury.

"Still... What do I do..."

It's not about the ointment, or about what I'd do with the dungeon, but on the subject of Futaba-san who I happened to have saved.

Now that I've calmed down, inevitably, doubts rise on whether this was the right thing to do. No, there's no guilt about the fact of saving her. At that moment, I hadn't for a single moment thought of abandoning her.

That would be because I am a person of great empathy and heart, which is not the case, but actually because I'd just seen such atrocious things done to another dead girl's corpse. I didn't want to see someone dying in front of me. There's not much other reason.

And it's fine that I saved her, but we now get to the primary problem, this unchanged situation akin to a battle royale. Though I've saved her life, there's no guarantee that Futaba-san will feel any gratitude towards me.

Although she was asking for help, she could have just been utterly despaired from this situation and desiring death. Or perhaps, she's like Higuchi, the type to kick down and use people. As the number of people who'd be able to escape, who'd survive, was clearly declared to be 3, there's no simple way of trusting anyone.

If that number had been 1, I'd currently be facing the even crueller internal debate of killing her or not. In that sense, the number of 3 is appreciable in that

one can have 2 other allies. There's a ways to go in trusting people-but, as soon as the 4th person appears, someone must be cut off, it's a harsh, restrictive number.

"hmm..."

Honestly, I don't think I can get along well with Futaba-san under these complicated happenstances. Will we aim for escape together, or will we distrust and go our separate paths... No, me being a shaman, I need to bring Futaba-san to my side by any means.

No way to know what her vocation might be, but whatever it is, it'd certainly be better than acting as a lone shaman. Even if you take away the vocation, Futaba-san simply has more power than me. Her upper arm is as thick as my thigh, it's slightly tight in her sailor uniform. Extending from that pleated skirt, her thighs are each as wide as my waist. She's not only thick, but tall too. An overwhelming body difference. Minimum-class Momokawa vs. Heavy-class Futaba, I don't think it's hard to decide who to bet on.

"If it's Futaba-san, she may be able to bash in at least one of those demons."

I must get my hands on that power. If you think about Higuchi's 3 member party, the students I'd encounter from now on likely wouldn't be going solo. In fact, if I meet another 3 man team, at worst, they might actively try to kill me.

Furthermore, as a shaman who lacks any and all offensive ability, I'd hinder any party I'd have hopes of joining.

But with this Futaba-san here, her being alone, she's moreover someone I've saved. There's no greater a condition for inviting her to join me.

"Damn... that's just evil..."

Basically, I'm planning to make Futaba-san owe me. It's the best course of action. Me having a clear benefit, saving her was no longer an act of kindness.

Disgusted at my own self-centered cunning, just thinking of it, I'd hesitate in trying to draw her in, but ultimately, I'd do it. I'll paint over a filthy facade, concealing my avaricious intentions with a cool front.

haha, being all chummy without a speck of trust. I'd never party up with such

scum.

“Nn... Uu nn...”

Just then, Futaba-san sluggishly stirred her body like a cow, letting out a strangely alluring voice. Her thigh-sized arm moved and her thick fingers rubbed around her eyes.

“Futaba-san... you woke up?”

Though I’d planned to forcefully drag her into my camp, I was unable to show a calm, refreshing smile, and ended up posing her that question with a strong, yet stiff feeling. Seems I haven’t got an ounce of acting talent.

“Ah... Momokawa-kun”

Slowly raising her eyelids, she called my name with a similar slack.

“G-good morning”

“Yeah... good morning... good mor-eh, huh, Momokawa-kun?”

Her languished eyes shot open as she became aware of me.

“No way, Momokawa-kun, why are—”

“Stop, don’t just get up yet!”

I panickedly stopped Futaba-san who had started to quickly raise herself, perhaps from the surprise of me being present. The wound on her belly hadn’t completely closed off yet.

“Huh, but, I... umm...”

“It’s okay, take it easy. I put some ointment on the wound on your belly, so please just rest for now—”

“Eh, my belly— Kya!”

Raising a truly feminine yelp, Futaba-san moved with unprecedented vitesse, and lowered the hem of her shirt. Seems exposing her barrel-like middle in front of a boy was quite the embarrassing situation.

“Ugh! Ouch!”

“Wha—, are you ok!? No, more importantly, the wound hasn’t closed so just

don't move!"

"Uu... S-sorry..."

Futaba-san apologizes teary-eyed. May be insensitive of me, but just now her expression seemed just like that of a chastised puppy, kinda cute. If that face wasn't so round, she'd be no different from a pretty girl. Her eyes were large and round, and her face itself was quite well balanced in fact.

"Is it, bleeding?"

"No... it's fine..."

For now, we had avoided the great disaster of the closed cut reopening.

"A, umm... Momokawa-kun, you saved me, right?"

Futaba-san asks with a timid feeling. Seeing the pure light in her eyes, my heart slightly jostles.

Prepare yourself, Momokawa Kotarou. This is the critical moment, you have to make her indebted to you and make her an ally, any means possible.

"Yeah, when I got here, I saw you collapsed. I quickly put on some ointment, and gave you first aid. I'm glad you're ok."

"Th-thankyou... truly, you're really the one who saved me Momokawa-kun. I thought I'd been dreaming"

Apparently, her memory of when she said "Help me" vaguely remained. Nice, with this there's no doubt that I'm the one who saved her.

"I, thought I was gonna die... So, so scared... But, I was so happy when Momokawa-kun came... So happy, you'd save someone like me again... Thankyou so much, Momokawa-kun, thankyouu... uu..."

"Eh, please Futaba-san, don't, cry so much..."

As if overcome by the great emotion of narrowly avoiding certain death, Futaba-san started crying unabashedly, so hard that it seemed talking further was impossible.

"Uuu, Momokawa-kun, thank you... weeeh!"

"I-it's fine, no problem, you're all good now, so relax—"

With this and that, for a while I was busy consoling the crying Futaba-san.

At some point, I found myself really irking the me thinking only about cleverly making this girl my ally.

At a scene like this, it would have looked much cooler if I concentrated solely on soothing her. But these idle thoughts kept popping up one after another, and I could give her words coated in sugar on the surface only.

“Sorry, Momokawa-kun. I’m, fine now.”

Nevertheless, with the solver of all things known as time, Futaba-san had come to relax. Now, it was finally time to have a real talk.

“So well, for now, can I get you to tell me how you got injured like this?”

Can’t rush things. First is to collect info. I have no idea why she was collapsed like that. I should get on with the main subject after knowing what happened to cause that.

“Aa, umm, I was... err...”

I had meant to ask the obvious first question, but Futaba-san’s expression began to cloud. What, was that the bad option?

Welp, gotta Quick Load and have another go now! My confused head could only output this kind of dumb thought.

“I, I was... uuu...”

As Futaba-san’s tears had reinvigorated their journey to the ground, I realized my complete lack of talent in giving proper counselling.

No, don’t give in. Even without talent, the conversation can’t progress without knowing her circumstances first. I have to get it out of her even if she’s crying.

“Calm down Futaba-san, it’s alright. First, from the beginning, right, please tell me, one by one, what happened after you left the classroom.”

“Uuo-okay...”

While sobbing relentlessly, Futaba-san gave me an affirmative nod. Alright, seems like she’ll talk.

“No need to hurry”

“Mm, Thanks Momokawa-kun... so you know, I—”

Chapter 10: Futaba Meiko part.1

Chaos swirled in the classroom that had begun its collapse. What Futaba Meiko remembered, was that mayhem and thinking, Ah, as she was thrown into the seemingly everlasting abyss of pitch black.

“N... uu...”

She awoke lying in a dark place. Cold, hard, and slightly wet too, there was nothing of greater discomfort. As she was recalling the soft, warm, fit-to-her-girth king-size bed in her room, her mind returned to reality.

Fortunately, she hadn't forgotten anything. After crying a bit from the anxiety of waking up in an unknown place, she was quickly able to grasp the current situation.

Apparently, they really had been brought to another world. She had been asleep inside a moss-covered small stone shrine-like building. A verdant forest peeking from the doorless, wide open entrance, opposite to which, there lay a spiral staircase running downwards.

Where should I go. Where'd everyone go. Again, the anxieties pinched at her large chest. As she was about to cry herself asunder for a second time, Meiko realized.

“Ah, right, the magic circle! From Momokawa-kun!”

Floating into her mind were, the bizarre patterns of white light on the blackboard, and the small boy with a cute-ish face sitting next her, her saviour.

The page with the drawing of his own work he had handed over so bluntly, it could be seen as some random scribbles, but right now, it was her only hope. Thankyou Momokawa-kun, saying as if praying to the LordBuddha, Meiko invoked the magic.

“Oh Gods above, grant us salvation with the force of thy miracles. For we shall adhere to thine decre— Kyaa!?”

As she had finished the recitation, a magic circle of light appeared on the back

of her hand. Dazzling, and at the same time, an acute heat.

“Kyaa—! What the, a-ouch, burning!”

In truth, the degree of heat wasn't so high as to warrant such a reaction, but the abnormality in her own body made Meiko yelp, made her cry out.

Though her shrill voice echoed annoyingly loud inside that small shrine, just then, she heard a voice.

“—shall we bestow.”

Not her own. Undoubtedly, it was the voice of a third party. It rang clearly inside her head, dispelling any doubts if it was her imagination.

“To thee, great power shall we bestow.”

It was a gentle female voice. Her mind, rattled with fear and anxiety, strangely came at ease. If there existed a goddess, surely she'd have such a voice, was how it seemed.

“—Uh umm, Vo, cation?”

Before she realized, the light on her hand had vanished, and the goddess-like voice, not to be heard. Having calmed down, Meiko noticed the words that had emerged on the page with the magic circle.

Reading them, she came to grasp the circumstances. Vocation, dungeon, transfer gate. It wasn't very believable, yet she had to acknowledge reality.

“I-it'll be tough... but we have to get back home, with everyone”

After much deliberation, Futaba Meiko at last took on the resolve to enter the dungeon.

Gripped in her shaking hands was a bulky butcher's knife. The characteristic rectangular blade sparkled with an intimidation as if saying it could make easy work of a whole cow.

Futaba Meiko belongs to Shiramine Private Academy's cooking club. Her hobby is food. That include both the preparation and dining of.

Being a missionary of the faith of gourmet since her younger days, her skill in the preparation of food grew along side the girth of her body. Making a lot,

eating as much. It is the logical result.

At any rate, on September 20th, the Monday after a 3 day long weekend, Meiko went to class with the personal knife set in her bag like always. Surely, after school that day, she'd again use these cherished, well sharpened knives on fine culinary creations, but by some twist of fate, they had become weapons for her self protection.

There was Kitaoji Ruriko, a friend in the same class 2-7, in addition to an adequate amount of other people also belonging to that club, but the one serious enough to bring their own knives was Meiko only.

Though she was currently equipped with the best gear, the prospect of her openly fearful and crybaby self swinging a blade almost crushed her heart. In fact, she was at her limit just holding on to the butcher's knife. She couldn't imagine pointing it towards the violent beasts known as monsters. Even if the opponent was a chihuahua-sized stray dog, she likely couldn't do it.

She could cut apart any number of ingredients, but something still alive was a no go. She could easily exercise her blade on seafood, like fish or octopi only.

"I-it's fine... since I have the Knight vocation... I'll be fine..."

Futaba Meiko was granted the vocation of 'Knight'. From the explanation in the notebook, there was no problem in fighting ability, it wasn't a bad draw.

Novice skills being 3: 'Abandon', 'Repel', and 'Blessed Body'.

'Abandon': Can react to the enemy's attack.

'Repel': Repel enemy attacks using weapons or armor.

'Blessed Body': A blessed body strong against injury and sickness.

A simple description of her powers had been entered into her head at some point, so she could quickly understand them. However, how to utilize these 3 skills to fight, Meiko had not a clue.

It wasn't a problem of her mental faculties, her grades were on the high end in fact. But unfortunately, there was no way she could logically come to the best solutions in this abnormal situation. To add, Meiko was quite distant from the world of RPG and action games. Her minute experience of gaming only

comprised of those popular among girls like that simulation with warm interactions between forest animals, and that famous puzzle game where you connected tiles with round jellies to make them disappear.

She had no idea what to think of this ‘vocation’ with its game-like skill system.

But fortunately, Meiko’s first encounter in the dark passages of the dungeon wasn’t a monster, but a familiar face, a classmate.

“—You’re, Futaba-san? Thank goodness, you’re safe.”

The person she encountered on a narrow crossroads was, possessing a slender, calm beauty completely contrasting Futaba Meiko, the class representative of class 2-7, Kisaragi Ryouko.

“K-Kisaragi-san! Fwaa— so glad, I’m so glad you’re here!”

Ryouko’s ever present calm and intelligent presence even inside the dungeon gave Meiko a peerless feeling of relief.

“W-wait Futaba-san, calm down”

Taken slightly aback by the large mass approaching her, Ryouko tries to calm the teary-eyed Meiko.

“—I’m pretty anxious about this place myself, but the goal is clear. No matter what, let’s get ourselves out of this mess and return to our world as fast as we can”

Walking along the passage which looked hard like concrete, talking about their situation brought back a bit more peace of mind to Meiko. Most of all, Ryouko’s strong words alighted hope in her heart that was crumbling in despair.

Kisaragi Ryouko and Meiko weren’t particularly close. You could count on one hand the amount of times they’d conversed. Still, Meiko knew. Knew that she wasn’t only of gorgeous appearance, but her grades and athleticism were also outstanding. Being called ‘class rep’ by everyone, her skill in leadership was also a guarantee. Moreover, she showed not the slightest fear in facing the greatest delinquent Tendou Ryuuichi who had sent a dozen punks from Black high to the hospital. In fact, she had the courage to even assert dominance over him.

Invoking a feeling of both admiration and abandon at never being able to

reach her height. That was the girl known as Kisaragi Ryouko.

“Hey Futaba-san, have you tried out this vocation thing?”

“Eh? A-umm... not yet”

“I see, I haven’t gone past the description either, but seems like we have no choice but to try them now huh”

After exploring the dungeon with Ryouko for some dozens of minutes, the time had come all too quick.

It was a round open space where many paths met. Contrasting the dreary gray road up till now, it was an area of green. The walls overgrown in ivy, crooked trees spanned from floor to ceiling as if replacing pillars.

But what widened Meiko’s eyes was not the abrupt change in scenery of this place, but its dwellers.

“Ha, ah... Those are... rats, right?”

From inside the slight darkness, with creepy red eyes, an animal familiar to the Japanese, it was a rat. Particularly, its size was larger than what one would imagine. It certainly wasn’t something you could describe as slightly larger than normal.

Dirty gray fur, and a long, narrow, hairless tail like an earthworm. A rat from all directions, except size, which was closer to a cat. It could bite back against a cat even if it wasn’t cornered.

Furthermore, this rat would, in reality, be able to make easily bite apart any cat. Since, in place of canines that facilitate chewing, its mouth was equipped with 2 sharp fangs like that of a saber-tooth tiger. It proclaimed its threat by releasing grinding sounds from its fangs and lines of saw-like teeth.

This kind of rat monster had appeared before Ryouko and Meiko. And in great quantity.

“No way... S-so manyy...”

Her large stature shaken, Meiko completely stiffened in fear. Forget attacking, she was currently the best tasting prey, one who couldn’t even run away. And not even lacking in filling. The rats were practically drooling a river at

the sight.

No reason for holding back. They probably hadn't scripted it out, but the rats, widening their eyes and mouths, all at once, began to move.

“—Ice Sagittaice arrow”

Just then, though her spine was frozen stiff, Meiko felt a real coolness on her skin. Right after, shingg, a shrill sound entered her ears. And then finally, she came to understand what had occurred before her.

“Wow... you can really use magic”

She easily praised the cool class rep. It was that amazing a phenomenon.

Ryouko's right arm extended, before it stood an icicle. Having pierced 2 of the rats at the same time.

Meiko hadn't seen it launch, but she could easily guess. Ryouko had invoked a magic that threw ice. And this transparent ice broke through the rats' bodies further staining their dirty gray fur in deep red blood.

Perhaps the rats became wary of the unprecedented counter. The pack halted its rush. Like an ebbing wave, they turned and took distance. And again, with great agility, they began to encircle Ryouko and Meiko.

“It pretty great, but it won't clear the way”

Ryouko seemed to have calmly analysed her power and the enemies' strength. Even in this crisis, she could make use of her head, and furthermore, take action upon that forethought. Ryouko was of astounding courage and guts.

Lest it be ignored, Kisaragi Ryouko's magic prowess too, was astounding.

“Ice —الجليد الباردة تجميد انتشار النار emission'!”

Along with a chant in a completely incomprehensible mystery language, Ryouko shouted what was likely the magic's name. Pushing both hands out at front with all her might, she manifested the 'Ice Blast'.

She created a blizzard. That was Meiko's impression.

From Ryouko hands surged air cold like the freezing gales of a midwinter

blizzard, and the next moment, the rats moving in front of them were frozen solid. Impossible to count, a great many of them.

With that single cast, about all of the rats on the forefront were annihilated. Their squalid gray bodies dyed in white snow, they had become unmoving statues of ice.

Faced with the fact that a large number of their allies had suddenly been slain, the rats were unable to take appropriate measures— meaning, they weren't able to make the quick decision of escape. Or perhaps, Ryouko's second volley was simply too fast.

"That should do it—"

One after another, she kept invoking 'Ice Blast'. This time mowing down the flock built up on her peripherals. The rats scampering on the ground had no ability to avoid the fierce gale that instantly froze them to the core.

"Amazing... Kisaragi-san..."

Soon enough, the pack of rats was no more. More than half frozen, the rest fled like baby spiders. Afterwards, the only things left behind were the creepy ice statues of monster rats.

"Phew, I'm glad that went well. With this magic, we can make do from now on"

So dazzling was the gentle smile of Ryouko. So much, that to Meiko, her own useless self looked like an ugly pig.

"Now, let's go, Futaba-san"

Relief from overcoming the crisis, and faith in Ryouko. With those, and, deep in her heart, a slight sense of inferiority, Meiko stepped forward.

"—I see, Kisaragi-san's vocation must be Ice Mage then"

With a proper vocation, I guess you can fight like that. I feel a bit of jealousy boiling up, but if I was in her shoes, suddenly able to launch ice magic, I have doubts it'd go so well.

It's highly likely that when these large rats with overgrown fangs, let's call them 'Fang Rats'— when this pack of fang rats was so easily done in, it was

undeniably by the superior talents of the individual Kisaragi Ryouko.

I had this thought from before, or should I say, I had indirectly felt it. That she was of the same type as Souma-kun or Tendou-kun. High-spec'ed, normierajuu, there're many easy words to describe them, but in the end it's that. beauty, brains, body, and even personality is top notch, winners in life.

“Direct attacks with ice arrows, and a cold air emission area attack. Full points in versatility huh... on that point, there's 3 novice skills so she must have another one. Futaba-san, do you know?”

“Eh, umm... Sorry, I don't”

Her brows arching as if troubled, Futaba-san made an apologetic face. I'm not blaming you ok, so that face is a bit troubling for me.

Giving a nice and gentle follow up line here might've been the perfect thing a man could do, but unfortunately, my deficiency in handsome-points makes that action unavailable. I thought about how to reply for a few seconds, but ended up with nothing in particular. Pathetic.

“...You not knowing probably means it was an always passive skill, or maybe she was intentionally keeping it from you.”

My ‘Pain Return’ and ‘Intuition Pharmacy’ worked without any chants or special actions, they were the always-active type. Futaba-san's ‘Blessed Body’ must be the same.

“Ah sorry, I kinda interrupted your talk”

Up till now, the plot's going in an enviously easy dungeon capturing direction. We haven't reached the scene where she, Futaba Meiko, is left absolutely bloody at the fairy square.

“Yeah, so then, you see—”

Really, what horrid truth will spill from that mouth of hers? I already don't have a good feeling about this, but yet, keep listening to Futaba-san's tale.

Chapter 11: Futaba Meiko part.2

Futaba Meiko and Kisaragi Ryouko smoothly progressed through the dungeon.

Every monster appearing along the way made for easy fodder against Ryouko's ice magic. The dog-like mid-sized monsters ate her 'Ice Sagitta', the fang rats and insect type small-sized ones were blown away by 'Ice Blast'.

Meiko had to only follow along behind her. Not a chance to make use of her vocation of 'Knight'. It was a safe and happy stroll in the dungeon.

And several hours after the fang rat incident, the two of them finally arrived at the dungeon's only known safe space, a fairy square.

"Looks like using these powers a lot can get you new ones. Look, Futaba-san —'Ice Shield'"

While on their break, Ryouko tests out her newly gained skill. In front of where she held out her hand, suddenly from nothing, a mass of ice, nay, a shield of ice manifested. At around 180 cm5'11" high, the ice, sprung forth from the ground, would protect the caster's whole body from frontal attacks.

Blurting out "Waa—" as if she'd seen a splendid magic trick, Meiko listened to Ryouko's explanation with her eyes bedazzled.

"Like the name says, it's a defence magic. If possible, I'd like not to receive attacks where I'd be forced to use it though."

Her battles with monsters using magic were, so far, flawless victories. Yet Ryouko did not grow pretentious, and seemed to be calmly analysing their situation.

Nevertheless, she was not someone exempt of danger. Indeed, danger is always sudden, hidden around the corner waiting its chance.

"—! This is bad, Futaba-san, get back!"

Ryouko's voice, tinged with impatience, echoed throughout the dome packed in verdure.

The 2 girls, finishing their break at the fairy square in under an hour, again delved into the dungeon, and soon enough, arrived at a great circular area sizing at more than 3 times that of a gymnasium. Like the room where the fang rats appeared en masse, it was a place overflowing with arbre, giving the impression of a small forest. Looking above, there seemed to be what looked like steel arches which gave the area the shape of a dome, so rather than a forest, it could be seen as more of a botanical garden. Moreover, the rectangular panels devices that released white light were partially destroyed, making it seem more like a dark, deserted building.

In that place, Ryouko and Meiko were suddenly under attack.

From the shadows and trees, multiple forms emerged. These forms seemed human at first glance, but their stature, about a head or so shorter, and their permanently hunched posture, made you see them more like monkeys.

To summarize, these are humanoid monsters that dwelled in the dungeon. They actively attacked people and preyed on their meat, a detestable existence even to this world.

They are called 'Goma'.

This information itself was procured from the magic circle just a few moments prior when checking it at the fairy square. Still, equating the written information with these ugly, obsidian beings in front of them was impossible for even the quick-witted Ryouko.

Still, her having defended successfully with her newly acquired 'Ice Shield' was indeed deserving of praise. Slashing attacks from the knives they wielded, arrows from beyond the thicket, they were all blocked by the bulky shield of ice.

Meanwhile, Futaba Meiko was in a daze, Ryouko used two shots of 'Ice Sagitta' to finish off the goma holding a knife and axe, at which point, the former finally let out a cry from fear.

Boldly charging in with her ice magic was Ryouko. On the other hand, Meiko equipped with the sharp meat cleaver mostly just cried in disarray. That was perhaps still better than her swinging it wildly in the darkness.

"These ones are, way too persistent!"

Up till this point, any monsters getting a taste of Ryouko's ice chose swift retreat. After losing 2 or 3 of their pack, they'd understand their powerlessness, or perhaps think the compatibility was off, promptly scurrying away. Though called monsters, they likely had the reasonable instincts of a wild animal.

Yet, maybe they had a fixation with humans, or perhaps they were so demented, the 5 or 6— including the ones pierced in ice, 10 goma, show no intention of ceasing their assault.

“—‘Ice Shield’!”

What was more worrisome than their absurd tenacity, was the occasional arrow whistling by from the darkness.

From what Ryouko could perceive at a glance, they were using arrowheads uneven in both shape and length, certainly not of metal, but sharpened stone or perhaps of bone from monsters or animals. Possessing no such thing as a fletching, their aim was far from perfect; overall arrows of crude and unreliable make.

But still, once nocked, drawn and released, the arrow will fly. Whether stone, or bone, it will pierce if sharpened. Soft human skin, possessing no such thing as a steel-like armor shell, wearing only a sailor uniform. She had no natural defences to prevent arrows.

Under the seemingly endless volley of arrows, Ryouko was slowly, but most assuredly, being cornered. Those poor excuses for arrows would never hit. But, if even one of them did, that would decide the match. With an arrow stuck somewhere in her body, could she use magic like right now, could she run away, could she, even think normally?

Ryouko was using ‘Ice Blast’ as a diversion, mixing in her main attack ‘Ice Sagitta’, in a desperate retreat from the forested dome.

Protecting the crying, uselessly large and largely useless pig behind her, Ryouko continued invoking her magic without a single complaint.

In the darkness, surrounded by trees, her visibility was quite limited. But the goma seemed to have good night vision even in that obscurity, and wouldn't lose sight of them. They can't see, the enemy can. One vs. many. It was a

miracle she was able to hold off that long.

“—Got’cha!”

Not letting the slightest movement in the bushes slip, she would kill the bone short-spear wielding goma as soon as it jumped out. Ryouko had no doubt her magic having the power to do so.

Her strength, mana, concentration, none of them had yet to wane, but then—

“Kh, ouch!?”

Her lucky streak ran out. An arrow with a blue crystal head grazed Ryouko’s left thigh. On her clean white skin ran a painful line of scarlet.

It wasn’t fatal. But from the sudden shock of pain while running, she pitched forward and fell. Her falling posture perfect. With her level of athleticism, there’s no reason she’d let herself plunge face first into the ground.

But from turning over to limit the shock, to getting back up again, there was a critical gap.

“Damn—”

When she got back up, she found 2 goma closing in.

One held a blunt-edged knife, and the other, a rusted hatchet. And both had an absolutely nauseating appearance with muddy yellow eyes, and squalid lines of teeth peeking from inside their mouths wide agape. From their filthy bodies drifted an odour, a horrendous melange of sulfur like from rotten eggs, and decaying fish. That along with their further ammoniac smell like that of toilet cleaning fluid, it made for the worst stimulus to your senses.

Urggh, as she tried to suppress her nausea, knitting those elegant, thin brows, the goma swung up their weapons, their prey to be caught in another step.

“A, ah, Kisaragi-san!”

At this point, Meiko finally stopped her slow running, and turned around. Being one-sidedly protected, she had been facing forward, concentrating solely on moving her legs, and even with her piggish, slow self, a small distance had opened up between her and Ryouko.

Naturally, even if she turned back now, she had no means to save Ryouko. Meiko was of vocation Knight. She possessed no magic based ranged attacks.

Indeed, Kisaragi Ryouko wouldn't be saved, unless of course, there was a third party involved.

“Ryouko-chan, you alright!?”

Along with the voice of a young girl rang dirty, hoarse screams.

What appeared first in Ryouko's eyes was the scene of 2 goma that had come as close as face to face, grandly falling over. She got a glimpse of the rusted knives stuck, on the throat of one, and the chest of another.

“No way, Minami!? How—”

“Just by chance! Now, run!”

Ryouko began running alongside the other girl. Her leg was in pain, but didn't seem to hinder movement. But more importantly, about this other girl.

Natsukawa Minami. That was the name of her classmate and savior.

Big, round, cat-like eyes were her charm point. Her bob-cut hair and well-tanned cocoa brown skin gave her an energetic image. Not undermining that impression, she was in fact even more lively and vigorous than she would initially let on.

She had allocated all that excess energy to the track and field club, being known as the new hope in her first year, and presently in her 2nd, attained the seat of ace. Naturally, her match was the sprint. With an explosive dash resembling her own personality, she had taken Shiramine Academy Track and Field all the way to the nationals.

This hardcore runner girl known as Minami and Kisaragi Ryouko were friends on a first name basis. She was the super girl of her club, and barely passing tests in class. Ryouko the class rep gallantly taking on the duty of aiding to improve her miserable grades was common fact in class 2-7. The super serious Ryouko would lend her homework to this Natsukawa Minami and Tendou Ryuuichi only.

That aside, the hot and lively Minami, and cool and intelligent Ryouko. Their personalities may be the exact opposite, but their bond contrarily was just as

strong. They wouldn't even hesitate to call each other best friends.

"Thanks, I owe you one, Minami"

"Nihaha, getting Ryouko-chan to owe me one, it's a once-in-a-life-time miracle!"

Her road to absolute despair had transformed into a path of hope thanks to her friend's smile, fiercely brilliant like the sun. Ryouko's heart, halfway given up, newly overflowed with strength.

"I'd love to celebrate our reunion, but we need to get away from those guys first"

"No probs, got you covered—"

Minami smiled like a mischievous child, and pointed at one of the passages connected to the wall. Indeed, there was no need to point it out as they had been rushing that way already.

Incidentally, having confirmed the saving grace of Minami, Meiko resumed her mad, wild-boar rush, coincidentally towards the same direction. Her head in chaos, there being no way to know if she was intentionally following Ryouko, but luckily they were all running in the same direction.

Moreover, having splendidly tripped on the curb of the intersection between the dome and passage and fallen inside, she had no clue of her astounding luck.

When the two others reached a Meiko in her embarrassing full view display of blush pink panties tight around her large butt, Minami shouted out,

"Now, Satou-chan! Shoot!"

In place of a reply, a single arrow flew through between the two. Its shining head spawned from inside the passage, and flew out into the dome. Its aim, not the goma chasing after them, but a strangely crooked tree, hitting right in the middle of its trunk as wide as a bunch of people. Making the abundant green leafage quiver, it made a dull sound.

A miss— jumping to the conclusion too quick, Ryouko realized that it had hit its mark perfectly.

brrr, the ground trembled and then, disappeared. Not that of the passage

they were on, but of inside the dome they had just escaped from a couple moments ago. Just beyond the curb, the earth in a 10 meter^{33'} diameter, turned to mist and vanished.

“Eh, the heck is this...”

Having the solid ground she had just stepped on, vanishing in front her eyes as if a mirage, made Ryouko mutter out astoundedly.

“It’s a pitfall. Seems like you can set up these kind of traps in quite a few spots here.”

Minami said casually as if live commentating on a game.

“Are pitfalls like, supposed to suddenly disappear like that?”

“Who knows? Isn’t it like a magic trap?”

It was a Minami-style thoughtless response, and truthfully, she couldn’t think of anything better. Ryouko herself had been exercising the phenomenon known as magic. That in mind, there’s nothing strange about there being traps impossible to replicate back on Earth. No, this being a place called dungeon, there’s no way they would be.

“Anyway, now those uglies won’t be coming after us anymore, so let’s get going”

The pit was made as if protecting the entrance of the passage they had jumped into. Peeking over the edge, one could see, not an everlasting abyss of black, but a white mist like dry ice blocking the view to the bottom. But undoubtedly, its depth was greater than human height.

The goma gradually gathered on the other side of the opening, as if chagrined at the loss of easy prey. Gyaagyaa, they screeched obnoxiously, but not one attempted to jump over to the other side.

Perhaps they knew the dangers of falling in there, or maybe even they had some reserves toward unforeseen traps. At the very least, this proved that goma weren’t able to make a 10-meter jump. Their strength was likely not so different from that of humans.

“Right, I want to hear a lot of things, but we should get moving for now”

With that, having narrowly escaped danger, Ryouko and Meiko leave behind the dome, and the screeching goma.

“Natsukawa-san’s vocation would be ‘Thief’ right?”

“Um, yes it is... how’d you know?”

With her round face and round eyes, Futaba-san asks utterly flabbergasted.

The one saving Kisaragi Ryouko at the nick of time was our track and field ace, Natsukawa Minami. Knowing her talents anyone could easily imagine her as— or is that just my gamer brain running wild again?

“No well, she was using knives and traps, so I kinda guessed”

“Yup, right, Natsukawa-san was using a knife, and could make pitfalls and find hidden doors you know”

Knife throwing and detection skills should be considered a given.

“Do you know her skill names?”

“Err, yeah... there was ‘Throw Dagger’ that made her good at throwing knives, and ‘Search Sense’ and uh... oh yeah something called ‘Quick Step’... umm, I think she said something about martial arts and was happily running really fast”

I see, so knife throwing, trap searching, and speed enhancing skills. They do seem like novice skills for a Thief.

“And she also learned ‘Slash’ and, ‘Abandon’ like I have on the way”

“What does ‘Slash’ do?”

“Well, I was always watching from behind so I don’t really get it... but I think she said it makes cutting much easier”

As the simplistic name states, it would have the effect of raising the power in a swing when the knife is used to cut. This should probably also be categorized as a ‘Martial Art’. From these names and descriptions, I get the image of a skill system separated from magic. Well, I don’t really care what the official types are though.

“What can I say, she seems pretty strong, that Natsukawa-san”

“Yeah, really strong! When the monsters came, she was always fighting at the

very front”

Seems she’s been playing the role of vanguard quite well. With Kisaragi-san using her ice magic as rear guard, they must’ve made a great combo. It’s like they got the standard fantasy arrangement going well with the melee fighter as a wall, and attack mage shooting from the back.

“But I was... just so useless...”

I guess she got reminded of her inferiority in power to Natsukawa-san while we were on the subject. The thought cast a cloud over Futaba-san’s visage, slight tears gathering at the edges of her round eyes.

If I act now with kind, gentle, and overall compassionate words to her, I too can become one of the winners in life, but sorry to say, I let that chance go to waste.

This girl’s been a useless load on everyone’s shoulders in the story till now, just my humble opinion. I may not be cool and handsome, but I can at least read the mood which reads not to speak that opinion out.

“S-so um... The Satou who shot the arrow, was it Satou-kun the guy, or Satou-san the girl?”

To conclude, the option I picked was, pretending not to hear Futaba-san’s self-deprecating mutterings, and continue with the story. Ignore is a useful skill I believe.

“Ah, sorry... It’s Satou-san the girl. Satou Aya-san”

So that her first name. Honestly, I just knew the surname.

She, like me, wasn’t someone who stood out. Speaking of which, there’s too much of a gap between the normal people in our class and the super high-spec ones like Souma-kun and Tendou-kun. When I saw my class roster, I thought they must’ve wanted to put all these cheat-status guys in one place. Of course, Kisaragi Ryouko and Natsukawa Minami were also of the superior group.

“Satou-san’s an Archer?”

“Yup, she said she was in the archery club in middle school”

Since we’re supposed to get a ‘Vocation’ best suited to our abilities, well, I

guess having a bit of experience doesn't hurt. If they weren't completely useless at everything, even the gods would grant something they were familiar with.

Not saying I've seen how skilled Satou Aya is, but she wouldn't be better than Souma Sakura with her nationals tier talent.

"So you guys met up with Natsukawa-san and Satou-san, only those two?"

"Yeah, as for others... We found someone's bag on the way, but didn't meet anyone else"

What came into mind was the scene of those demons called goma that were eating a girl. If they were eaten like that, no way there'd be any body left.

Shit, remembering it made me sick to my stomach. Let's not—

"So you guys were now a 4 person team..."

Oh man, this number 4, made it worse. As in, the punchline's already been revealed.

Revealed to be exactly what I imagined when I found Futaba-san left dying in this fairy square.

Chapter 12: Futaba Meiko part.3

It was smooth sailing. Kisaragi Ryouko who could manage to traverse the dungeon solo, now had gained allies: The Thief, Natsukawa Minami, and the Archer Satou Aya. They seemed practically invincible.

Minami had a combination of her hitherto nurtured athletics which, together with her vocational skills, made her a perfect melee fighter. As for Aya, she was, as she appeared, of average talents but, her vocation instantly enabled her to enter battle.

‘Aim’: Increases aim, thereby raising the strength and accuracy of the bow.

‘Concentrate’: Can draw the bow without faltering of mind.’

‘Fletchery’: Can make arrows well.

Though nothing blatantly overpowered, needing just a bow, attack and ammunition are covered while leaving room for improvement; they were a well balanced set of novice skills.

Luckily, Aya had cleared the first big hurdle of procuring a bow early on. Aya had met Minami just when the latter was about to take down a goma with a bow, it was practically like a blessing from the god of archery.

And now, a few hours after leading the dome and entering a fairy square, that girl was yelling hysterically.

“—Eh, let me get this straight, so this means only three of us will be saved!?”

“C-calm down, it’s okay, so just calm down alright!”

Even Minami, whose cheerful smile and relaxed attitude wouldn’t crumble during dangerous dungeon battles, voiced those words tinged with impatience and unease.

“W-w-wh-what do we d-d-do...”

Quivering with all her plus sized body, Futaba Meiko was all too quickly in tears.

It wasn't uncalled for them to fall into so much disarray. Since, when they checked on the updated information on the magic circle, they were made aware of that shocking rule.

The transfer gate located at the deepest part of the dungeon would only allow a maximum of 3 people to enter— that is, there was a limit to the number of people who could escape.

“We don't know the veracity this information. So let's not think too much about it.”

Only one of the four, Kisaragi Ryouko, was calm, and trying to put everyone at ease.

“Don't think about it, then the heck are we supposed to think!”

Apparently 'Concentrate' only had effect when using the bow, in other times, there would be no convenient calming of mind. As if demonstrating the validity of that statement, Aya furiously argued back.

“We have to get a lot more monster cores to use this transfer gate. It's been quite easy up till now, but who knows what's to come. So don't risk yourself with useless worries while fighting”

“But, then wh—”

“What we need to do right now, is hope”

Aya looked at the class rep, who said all that with a straight face, as if she was talking to a mental case.

“So you're just... gonna give me those sugared up lines even now”

“They aren't just pretty words. Since we, we really do have a hope”

Ryouko proclaimed those words with a gentle smile of an utter confidence, no, a conviction one could say. Taken slightly aback from that bold counter, Aya asked the standard follow, 'What would that be?'.

“Souma Yuuto and Tendou Ryuichi. If it's those two, they can definitely overcome this, yes, even this crazy place.”

Not one of them could deny or laugh at her answer. Most likely, not a single

member class 2-7 would disagree.

“Look, even we can fight those monster with our vocations. I bet those 2 with this power, would easily become real superheroes”

Ryouko’s words were not to be considered pitiable or faith based absurdity. Anyone would think so if they knew those two. Anyone would believe.

“We’re headed to the same place, so if we continue on like this, we’ll absolutely convene with Souma-kun. And then he’ll save you, and everyone else too”

“S-Souma-kun will save me...”

Perhaps she was imagining Souma Yuuto’s gallant figure as he leapt head first into danger. Aya’s cheeks blushed cerise, and her face dissolved into rapture.

Ryouko wouldn’t condemn her for such a display. Around half the girls of class 2-7 would show the same reaction.

Like the boys who would fall for Souma Sakura’s beauty at first glance, the girls would have a similar wanting for Souma Yuuto. Satou Aya, she too was one of those who had secret feelings of wanting to be near him.

“Yes, believe me, Satou-san. Souma-kun, will come save us”

“—Fha! Y-you’re right... Souma-kun’s the type who can really do it”

Aya quickly agrees, saving face as if she had only been logically convinced.

“Yup, well said, we’ll be just fine with Souma-kun around! This is like a game world, so rather than superhero, he’d be like, a warrior hero?”

Silver armor and a cape fit him perfectly, that had been proven on the stage play at the school cultural festival the previous year. The piece was Snow White. His role merely that of passing by at the end to give kiss, but his presence, more prince-like than any prince, almost made you forget the whole tragedy that was the brunt of the story.

“But rather than Souma-kun, Ryouko-chan’s prince charming is more like Tendou-ku—”

“H-hey, stop that Minami! We’re not like that ok!”

Ryouko reacts just like Aya did a few moments ago, Minami giving her the usual wide, teasing grin. In these situations, even the cool class rep. is an open book.

“Nihaha, I’ll leave it at that then.”

“Why— you little!”

“Hey, ow! Wait, no violence please! And no using magic either!”

Her pretty face dyed red, Ryouko one-sidedly catfighting her friend, was an image distant from the ever reliable class rep. She looked more like a grade-schooler.

In that fashion, these girls had not made the information about the number restriction a big issue. That is, not yet.

The 4 resumed their journey.

It had been 10 minutes since, having rested with a nap, reinvigorating both their strength and vitality, at the fairy square, at which point their next encounter with monsters was upon them.

What appeared was a pack of wild dogs with blazing red fur. At a size somewhere between a Shiba and a Golden Retriever, their rough panting and blood-shot eyes plainly displayed their savage nature.

“—Sorry! 3 incoming!”

Minami shouts while slicing open a dog at the neck with the chef’s knife in her right hand. 4 others had gotten around past her with the vigour of a fireball, but she had back-thrown the knife in her left hand, hitting one dead on the back. As a result, like Minami said, 3 of them were headed towards the two rearguards.

“Futaba-san, you’re on!”

Sharp instructions from Ryouko. The rear was occupied by the Ice Mage, Kisaragi Ryouko and Archer, Satou Aya. The Knight, Futaba Meiko was to be together with Minami at the front— was not something anyone expected of her, so she was put at the awkward position of mid-guard.

Though she, as a Knight, should be at the very forefront, tanking the enemy, she had been given the kind and considerate task of stopping even just one of

the ones getting past Minami, a Thief.

“Kya—! Waa—!”

As if ripping apart that kindness from her allies, Meiko put full power into dodging. Without having swung her meat cleaver even once, she simply dropped it and rolled across the ground. Her figure exactly resembling a beer barrel rolling down a slope.

“The hell, are you do—ing!”

Her target set with ‘Concentrate’ Aya burst her shot with ‘Aim’ together with her angry voice. The goma-brand arrow pierced the fangs born, drool slobbering, fast approaching dog deeply right between the eyes. 100% accuracy. And, 1-hit-kill.

“...‘Ice Sagitta’”

Ryouko’s icicle was thicker and longer than an arrow, but certainly didn’t fire any slower than the bow. Even without a specific skill, her aim was true, and beautifully struck through the dog’s torso.

The 2 rearguards took out 2 of the dogs instantly, but there were a total of 3 approaching. There was still one left. Very close. A 2nd arrow or icicle wouldn’t make it.

The dog, as if assured of its kill, raised sparks as it clanked its jaws.

“Ugh, shi—”

“‘Ice Shield’”

Just then, a shield of ice soundlessly appeared, and the dog, having jumped in, mouth open wide for the kill, foolishly crashed headlong into it. Raising a miserable whine, the dog’s body promptly dropped to the ground.

“Though I can’t rapid-fire attack magic, defensive ones don’t seem to have that limitation, looks like”

Explaining this to Aya with a chill expression, Ryouko shot the dog with another ‘Ice Sagitta’ before it got back up.

“Ryouko-chan! Satou-chan! You guys ok!?”

At this point, the pack of red dogs was making hasty retreat. Minami didn't give chase, and was running back, worried about her friends.

"Sigh... I'm seriously glad we got Kisaragi-san with us"

"Satou-san, you beat enemies too, so you're not too shabby yourself"

"Hey, I've got the highest kill count! So praise me more Ryouko-chan!"

"You don't have to tell me, it's because you're giving it your all at front that we in the back can actually attack, Minami"

At the cheerily bantering three stared Futaba Meiko, in all her ugly, dirt-smeared glory. Rising sluggishly like a bovine after its afternoon siesta, she hoisted up her round frame.

However, she didn't have the courage to take a single step in returning to the other three.

"...Futaba-san, are you okay? hurt anyplace?"

Ryouko called out to a Meiko, hesitating at the corner of the room, in a gentle voice.

"Yes, I... I'm sorry, I'll, go get the cores now"

No one was blaming Meiko for her unseemly display. Certainly, Satou Aya was glaring at her with unobstructed scorn, but there were no hateful comments actually being made.

But if anyone were to condemn her behavior, Meiko wouldn't have any valid refutation. She knew, knew exactly how incompetent and useless she currently was. Everyone was fighting with their lives on the line, while Meiko was so scared, so utterly terrified when enemies approached her, that she knew no action but to run. In reality, she did run. Not giving a damn about her allies, just herself.

"Then, if you'd be so kind. You're in the cooking club, Futaba-san, so you seem to be familiar with dressing and the like"

"She's like, the right woman for the job? Nihaha, It's a bit too much for mee"

It was not enough to just defeat monsters. Unlike in games, there was nothing

like experience points that showed a solid numerical measurement of growth, never mind the corpse disappearing in smoke to reveal gold coins or item drops; even for a world of fantasy and magic, that was too much to ask.

There was no point in not collecting the core planted inside the cadaver. If they reached the transfer gate and didn't have enough to actually power it, that would be a real problem.

"S-sorry... There was just three"

Making full use of her set of knives, Meiko quickly finished dismantling the dogs' bodies and retrieving the cores with the proficiency of a seasoned chef. On top of her plump palms certainly rested 3 small cores like broken red marbles.

The number of dogs they had beaten were 10. Meiko missing another 7 cores was not because she had failed to find them but because they simply didn't exist. As for the fang rats they had first defeated, not one of them contained cores.

Meiko who had been dealing with all the monster bodies on their journey, could easily tell if they contained cores or not. After skinning them a bit, she could somewhat sense them by presence. Additionally, she could also feel out what spot they were located. That is to say, core retrieval was a no brainer. Even without Meiko's culinary expertise, a novice could find it randomly poking around.

For this reason, the real problem was the low rate at which they were collecting cores.

It was a scary thought, but maybe it was useless collecting these tiny glass-fragment-like cores in the first place. That was one of the worse cases.

"Can't be helped, they were pretty weak monsters after all"

Ryouko received the 3 cores from Meiko with no complaint. Looking at it another way, there was no word of gratitude either.

"At the pace we're going, we'll level up any time now! Then it'll be a core smorgasbord!"

“But I don’t wanna fight stronger monsters... Sigh... If they don’t go down with one arrow... I just, no”

Minami tries to console the depressed and anxious Aya with her air-headed smile and optimism. And while Ryouko looked over them with a smile, they made their departure from that area.

Meiko, wallowing in shattering self-derision, followed the 3 from a step behind.

It was when, another 3 battles after the red dog encounter, they were on their 4th struggle.

What appeared were goma. The location, a passage crowded in trees withered white. It was less dense, and brighter than the forest dome where they teamed up with the Minami party, but there were more than enough blind spots.

“—Ah!”

Cried Meiko. She stood at the very rear. Having been deemed completely useless in combat, she was naturally positioned in an only-to-be-protected rear, even farther back than the rearguard team of Ice Mage and Archer.

However, that was the case only if the enemy appeared from in front. Even in games, there are attack patterns where the enemy comes from behind. And in real life, there was no way monsters wouldn’t be able to take a similar course of action.

“KyaaAAAA!”

Armed with a large naked claw as a knife, a goma jumped out from behind the white snags.

When Meiko turned and saw that suddenly appearing goma, with that figure, more repulsive than any demon, right at her face, she had completely forgotten to run and froze up.

“GuobuBiBA!”

It came slashing with a strange war cry. A straight, wide, horizontal swipe. Meiko could clearly see the movements of that goma.

With the Knight's 'Abandon', she could achieve the miracle of evading that attack with room to spare. Meiko could pre-cognitively see with a faint white glow, the exact trajectory of that blade.

She understood that the path of the blade was swiftly approaching her plump abdomen. She could fathom it.

There was room for dodging, and even defending.

'Repel' would allow her to use that meat cleaver she was holding to easily bounce back the coming strike. If she triggered it, the counter from Meiko's think arms would fling away the goma's attack along with its lightweight body, launching it straight to the ground.

Yet, the future with her taking that course of action would not come. Sole reason being, Futaba Meiko, and her own lack of courage. She cowered in fear. Her attacks, bound.

"Gyi, iyaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAa!!"

Her middle was shred. A straight, level line. The goma, though a stranger to the way of the sword, had struck its target just as planned.

The blade of fang cut deeply into Meiko's belly. The cloth of her sailor uniform possessing no defence against the edge. That her layer of fat wouldn't be enough to stop the blade was something Meiko, who had cut, dressed marbled meat countless times, knew all too well.

Raising a deranged scream, more from the psychological shock from the attack than the violent pain, Meiko collapsed belly up.

"Bah, guRuA— GebA!"

As the goma swung up its knife, attempting to mount Meiko and deliver the killing blow, A chilling bolt of frost drove into its ugly, twisted face.

"Futaba-san!"

Luckily at that moment, the bout with the goma platoon had reached its terminus; which was a fact Meiko was bound not to notice.

At any rate, Ryouko, then Aya, and finally Minami too, quickly ran over to the injured Meiko.

“Huff, haa, ah... Aa... I-it h-ouw... It hurts...”

“Don’t talk! I’ll get first aid righ—”

“How are you gonna do that, we have no bandages or disinfectant!”

“B-Band-Aids, I have tho...”

“Those won’t do frick here!?”

The girls fell into a tumultuous panic. But to Meiko, whose mind gone blank in shock, they sounded just like the sports clubs people shouting their vigor-filled mantras as they practiced on the grounds outside.

“No it’s alright, we still have those herbs from the fairy square”

Ryouko had calmly, yes even in this uproar, calmly singled out the ideal solution.

What she retrieved from her bag was a mere handful of grass. With their particular heart shaped leaves, they were of a form quite similar to that of the 4-leafed clover.

“Herbs you... that’s everything we have you know!”

“Yes, but even one of these are very effective”

The wound on Ryouko’s left leg had all but disappeared. This was pulled off using only one of these 4-leafed herbs.

Thanks to the info from the magic circle, they knew the effects of this clover-like herb found at the fairy square. When they doubtfully tried it out, everyone had the thought that it must be a magic plant.

Its usage, simplicity itself. Just grind up and apply to the affected area.

“That’s what I mean! With a cut that deep, we’d need all of, no, maybe even all of it wouldn’t be enough”

“Yes, you’re absolutely right. We actually have... no guarantee it’ll work”

“So why the hell are you trying to waste our precious medicine!”

Indeed, this herb was precious. They could gather a handful of these from the fairy square overgrown in flora. The place was chock full of 3-leafed ones. Only

the 4-leafed one being curative. Having gone scouring for them like they were back in kindergarten, the 4 girls understood that the chances of finding one were as slim as on Earth.

“It’s not a waste, and if we don’t, Futaba-san will...”

“So what do you propose we do next time when it’s one of us! Can you guarantee we’ll find more of these at the next square? If someone gets there before us, I assure you they’ll be hoarding every one of them!”

Veins spreading in her eyes, discharging sputum, Aya kept on talking in a state of maximum frenzy. Nevertheless, her assertions indeed hinted at a slight soundness. Even Ryouko couldn’t completely refute her.

“So Satou-san, are you implying... we leave Futaba-san to die?”

Ryouko raised the ultimate question.

“... Isn’t that question’s a bit unfair? Kisaragi-san, You get it too, don’t you, honestly?”

At Aya’s reply in a warped smile, Ryouko impulsively averted her eyes.

“Y-you’re wrong, I’m...”

“No I’m not! I’m not the bad guy here ok, I mean, there’s no other way to look at this! Think a bit about the future, then anyone, even I get it you know!”

“But, that’s—”

“H-hold up!”

Minami came in to stop the two delving further into their unsightly squabble right in front of the victim. Speaking of whom, they realized they hadn’t noticed her at all since the part about band-aids being useless.

“Be any louder, it’s like you want more monsters. Like, there’s the blood too, those dog-like ones’ll smell us right away!”

At Minami’s very-likely-to-happen statement, Aya’s face paled, and Ryouko’s lost color. Realizing that, even as one of them was on the verge of life and death, they too were being exposed to danger.

“S-so let’s just get out—”

“Got us covered, I found a fairy square just a bit from here! Yeah, so let’s carry Futaba-san there first”

Minami points at the right of the T-junction where the passage of snag ends. Apparently, she had quickly gone and checked beyond there.

“Right, let’s. If there’s more herbs at that fairy square, then all our problems are as good as solved”

“... Hm, I guess”

Thus, the three immediately began working.

“N, ngu...”

Groaned languishedly, not Meiko, but Ryouko.

“Nghah! Heavy damnit! How many frickin’ kilosounds are you even packing!”

It was a miracle that three girls were able to lift Meiko’s massive frame. No, to be precise, they were only having her lean on their shoulders.

Feeling as if being crushed, they somehow or other managed to get Meiko walking. So as to suppress the bleeding even a little, Ryouko had wrapped her own jersey around her abdomen. Looking at the navy blue of the Shiramine Academy jersey steadily darkening from blood, its efficacy was doubtful.

“Huff... Haa... Finally, made it...”

Aya wheezes in ragged breaths. Ryouko was silent, and even the chippy Minami had lost her words.

“Let’s just, find those herbs...”

Beads of sweat accumulated on her forehead, Ryouko voiced the demand, and the three made for the fairy square’s herbage.

Meiko laid to sleep right by the fountain; the three silently searched with her occasional gripes of pain as BGM.

“...no good”

The result, obvious from those 2 words. A single stalk. That was the totality of the harvest.

“Haha... Ahaha... It’s over”

With a tired expression, Aya says, indolently seated on the lawn with her legs thrown out.

“Wh, hey, it’s over, you...”

On the verge of crying, Minami nervously looks back and forth between Aya and Ryouko.

“Don’t, make me say it ok... Hey, class rep, what do we do”

Ryouko had deeply furrowed her brows, choosing silence. How long had she hung her head in shame? Likely not even a minute, but yet, her painful silence felt eternal.

“Futaba-san... we can’t save her anymore”

A bitter decision.

“Eh!? Ryouko-chan!”

“Ahaha, you can stop the miss goody two-shoes act you know, Natsukawa-san”

“N-no, I wasn’t—”

“Like, it’s fine. It’s over, over means over ’kay. No one’s fault here”

Aya was muttering ‘fault’, ‘not my fault’ in-between dry laughter. How could she, a normal highschooler, be expected to keep composed after these cruel events. Nothing wrong with wanting to escape reality.

“These curative herbs are extremely valuable to us right now. What if I got injured enough to be unable to use magic, what if Satou-san got her arm cut so bad she couldn’t draw her bow... Most of all, Minami, you who’s been fighting monsters at the front, you’re the one most likely to receive a wound”

Ryouko had been watching from behind and knows exactly how well Minami kept avoiding all sorts of attacks with her unparalleled athleticism, physical prowess, and ‘Abandon’. But it wasn’t good to be hubristic upon this evasion ability. Even if they weren’t against a powerful monster, it was easy to imagine her surrounded by more goma than she could cope with.

“Uh, but I’m... fine, see...”

“That’s not the point, Minami. If something happens to you, Satou-san and I who are ranged attackers will surely go down right after. Honestly, we should’ve decided how to use the herbs long ago.”

As if to escape the suffering, Ryouko averted her eyes from Minami, and of course, Meiko too, just staring at the grass. At the end of her gaze, a conveniently placed 4-leafed clover, was not there at all.

“So you see, we have to let Futaba-san go now. So that we can survive. Wasn’t it obvious, that useless pig was bound to be thrown away”

“Stop it Satou-san, you can’t say it like that”

“So what way can I say it your highness? Will you forgive me if I cry and apologise to Butaba... isn’t that like, a little bit hypocritical?”

“Whatever she did, you can’t call yourself a person if you say that!”

You can’t just give up on a human life just because it’s more efficient or if they’re useless.

“...No sorry. Like, I shouldn’t spit on the dead huh”

Ryouko’s face was sour enough to make her teeth grind. She had been stumped. Aya was right. No matter how many morals you held on too, having decided to let Meiko die, all of them would become utter hypocrisy. All three of them, would have to carry that weight.

“Hey, can’t we leave already? If you wanna watch over her till she dies, that’s a bit too much for me alright?”

It wasn’t fun for any of them. One could tell at a glance that Aya, and of course Ryouko and Minami too, all of them wanted to get away from this place of guilt.

“...You’re right. There weren’t any herbs here, so there could’ve been previous visitors”

“If some selfish trash gets to the transfer gate first, they’re pretty much not gonna wait around. If that 3 person limit thing is true, we’ll really be in at the deep end”

They could trust in Souma Yuuto's strength. Still, whether they could or couldn't make it to the goal first, was indeed a bit doubtful. The girls had seen many times along the way, places where the dungeon was caved in, passages that you couldn't take. With a bit of bad luck, they could need to go on long detours to arrive at the transfer gate. Worst case, they could also be completely blockaded from their destination.

If there was student luckier than Yuuto, yet utterly self-centered, they would undoubtedly rush to the exit with no regard to others.

"Also hey, there's exactly 3 of us now. Casting aside Butaba was just a matter of sooner or later huh?"

"...Just, stop Satou-san. You don't need to spell it out, I, got the full picture"

"If you do, then fine. I'd be happy if I didn't die 'cause of some hard feelings—but, you two seem alright. Since we made a decision everyone's ok with right?"

And then, Aya soberly stood up. After patting off the grass on her skirt, she walked towards Meiko at a casual pace. And from the bag lying beside her, she took out a squarish black case.

"Satou-san, that's—"

"Something she won't be needing anymore. And much better than using those goma knives"

The case being handed straight to Minami, was of course, Meiko's beloved knife set. Those sharp blades would be a godsend for a Thief. Perfect for carrying and storage, too good to pass up. Naturally, the meat cleaver equipped on Meiko would also be collected.

Minami was already borrowing a chef's knife, having a spare carried no loss. Moreover, Ryouko and Aya could both carry one for self-defence.

"E, I umm..."

"No worries, I'll give it over later"

Being considerate to Minami's feelings, who was tearing up, and hesitating to receive it, Aya forcefully shoved the knife set into her own bag. It was quite the size, but a schoolbag devoid of the deadweights known as textbooks and

reference books could manage the room.

“Guess we’re about done here”

And this time, Aya really did head on straight out of the fairy square. Ryouko and Minami, be as downcast as they may, followed after her.

“... W-wait... Help, me...”

Though feeble, that clinging voice definitely reached the ears of those two.

“...I’m sorry, Futaba-san”

“S-sorry... I’m so sorry...”

Leaving her with just that, the two left. Not once turning back.

Futaba Meiko was thus abandoned. A fitting end for the useless pig— was not a sentiment she herself would ever truly accept.

Her consciousness fading, what remained in Meiko’s heart was simply fear. Neither regret at her own actions, nor resentment towards the 3 who left her.

Just scared, frightened, and cold. She felt like she could just sink into that sea of cold but,

“Futaba-san! Futaba-san, are you alright!”

Descended the voice of her savior—

Chapter 13: Shaman and Pig

“Uh-huh...”

I couldn't do anything but make that random, buffoonish sound.

“... Yeah”

Futaba-san nods while shedding large drops of tears.

You're strong, enduring all that— are not the thoughtless words of praise I felt like giving her.

“Uh-huh, I see... haha, so even that class rep has the heart to throw people aside...”

I surprised myself with how low, how dark the emotions residing in that mumble were.

Yeah, I knew it wouldn't be a fun story. And certainly, I understand what those girls decided was somewhat reasonable. Limited recovery items, combat ability, threshold on survivors. Futaba Meiko who wasn't committing a thing. There couldn't be a better candidate to cast aside at that first juncture.

I was neither hot-blooded compatriot of justice, nor was I a charitable man of the cloth. So in a similar situation, I'd make the same decision. I could end up, unlike the class rep and Natsukawa-san who hesitated till the very end, spewing uglier, more egotistic than even Satou Aya. Those girls, did nothing wrong.

“Like hell they didn't...”

Yet, from deep inside my heart, rises a tremendous hatred. Come face to face with a victim of this abdication, an unrelenting contempt, a painful rage sweeps over me.

Because the Futaba-san in front of is that pitiable— is not the reason. It's because, she's just like me. Hopelessly incompetent, a useless good-for-nothing.

“If you weren't some shitty Shaman, but something like a Healer, I'd've already left this useless lard and made you a pal.”

Memories of humiliation resurface.

“Hey, aren’t you glad Saitou, your good pal got a shitty vocation. Thanks to Kotarou-kun being a Shaman, I wasn’t discarded by Higuchi-samaa, aren’t you thinking that while hittin’ away. Man, you really got a great friend there. Might be jealous.”

The filthy sensation of spit on my cheek is dredged up.

Yes, it’s because I’m powerless that I lost to Higuchi. It’s because Futaba-san is powerless that she wasn’t recognized as in ally. Both were the same, a natural result of our own inability.

But no way was I such an upright person, or some kind of defeatist so as to submissively accept that result.

No way in hell. I don’t know about others, but if it’s me, no way I wouldn’t rage, wouldn’t loathe, wouldn’t curse—

“Futaba-san, let’s team up”

I gave it to her straight, no roundabout, tempting narration, not a hint of trying to lead her into wanting it like some scam. I wasn’t in the mood for hogwash opening remarks, no, I basically just felt like saying it.

“...Eh?”

Blinking her round overflowing eyes, Futaba-san stares at me. Normally, I’d be lacking the handsome-points to meet a girl’s eyes, but with the influx of malevolent emotions right now, I could look straight back at those circular irides.

“Futaba-san, I don’t think you want to die yet?”

“Uh, yea...”

“And of course you aren’t thinking it’s so miserable being betrayed and want to commit suicide?”

“N-never!?”

That’s good, she still has the energy to instantly deny suicide. If she was chronically depressed or something, I’d have another boat-load of trouble

doing, cheerup and counselling.

If she has the will to live, I'd more than welcome her aboard. Well, not like I have the luxury to pick and choose my allies.

"Then, team up with me. This dungeon's quite too much for me to capture solo"

"A-uh, but... I... can't, do anything... So scared, I can't fight... I'll definitely be a pain for you, Momokawa-kun!"

"That's fine, I can't fight either. I'd even bet, my vocation is the weakest in the whole class"

It's really quite pathetic, but here I shall boldly proclaim. For I doth be the true weakest.

"... Momokawa-kun's, vocation?"

"It's Shaman. Forget offensives, I don't have any defence or evasion either. Top it off, not a thing for getaways either"

Yeah, you're damn right Higuchi, a Shaman can literally do fuck all, a real shit vocation, for now. I beat the Armor Bear, but that was basically me using up a lifetime's worth of luck.

"But, Momokawa-kun, you saved me!"

"The herbs were just that good. If you know the recipe, anyone can make it"

There's no such thing as being extra effective when hand-made by a Shaman. If it was a game, maybe you couldn't make concoctions without that vocation, or alternatively, you could have corrections that, with it, the effects would be many degrees higher but... Sorry, none of that here.

My Shaman powers basically amount to 'Intuition Pharmacy'. If the knowledge of effects and recipes got out, they'd stop being only mine.

On the other hand, a 'Healer' would use their skill itself for recovery effects, a power uniquely available through them. Worst case scenario, they'd get me to cough up all I knew about herbs, and just off me.

Ah, then I guess, it's actually better I not tell anyone the types of herbs, and

how to make meds from them. Even if I'm teaming up with Futaba-san. The confidentiality of herb knowledge, is pretty much one of the only factors of my worth.

Wow, I'm pretty much trash for thinking these things literally in the middle of inviting her. Well, self-reproach aside. Right now, I need to concentrate fully on capturing Futaba-san.

"I really am the weakest, and in this dungeon, the most useless out of anyone. 'Cause of that, I almost got killed once"

"Really!? So you mean... Momokawa-kun, you also... umm..."

Receiving Futaba-san's gentle, considerate, and wholesomely sympathetic gaze, I silently nod.

I mean, me wanting to join Higuchi's merry bunch, is a 11 out of 10, fuck no. You can bow down dogeza and beg me to join your party all you want. I'll bash y'with a Red Shroom, motherfucker.

"I don't think there's anyone who'll be needing me anytime soon. What about you, Futaba-san, if we catch up to class rep's bunch, you think they'll want to take you back?"

"T-that's... I don't..."

Well duh. How barefaced do you have to be to just act like nothing happened and run back to the party that fired you. Matter of fact, if you did, they'd make you leave by force this time. That slightly crazy Satou Aya might even come at you with 'Aim'.

But the point here is not only with the class rep party, but in making Futaba-san imagine the scenario at every encounter with other classmates too. She should've noticed. If that class rep, if even Kisaragi Ryouko abandoned her, no one in their right mind would take in her incompetent self.

Well, someone like Souma-kun might've made a more appropriate reply; hey, if you'd been left to die, and your heart was practically on the verge of shattering, anyone would take you in, or something, not really, I wouldn't know.

"The chances of us getting protected by people with strong vocations are next

to nil. The class rep might've refuted it, but I'd bet there's more people who take that info about the 3-person limit with more than a grain of salt. Even if they aren't fully convinced, they'd be acting under that premise being true. So, they won't have any room for useless dependees"

"No... but... you're right..."

It's tough pill to swallow, but seems Futaba-san is sensible enough to accept that harsh reality. Could even be that she's only buttering up to me, pretending to listen to my boring explanation-cum-lipservice.

Well, I don't care either way. No one wants to group themselves with a Shaman, is an absolute truth I can say with unbending confidence. I've spoken not a single falsehood.

"So, weaklings as we are, we should try to work with that presupposition. I'm not too crazy about letting myself die. Futaba-san, didn't you say you felt the same?"

"Yeah, that's right... definitely not, I thought, I was really gonna die that time... so, so scary..."

I don't like thinking one person can truly understand another, but this one's the exception.

The time I encountered the Armor Bear, the moment I beat it. The span I peeked at the Goma eating the girl. Death, was at the epicenter of all of those incidents; and every time, it formed in me a tremendous ripple of fear and repulsion. I never want to do that again. I never want that to be me. No matter what, no amount of pain or suffering would make me pass the uncrossable line of desiring death.

"Yeah, so to not die, we'll do anything. So we can survive, we should use any means we can. So please, Futaba-san. Join me, and let's challenge this dungeon together."

"R-really... you're really ok with me?"

"I wouldn't take anyone but Futaba-san"

"I, can't do a thing, I really am useless... you know?"

“Others are just overpowered. Every one of them started off so strong it’s unfair... but us, we’ll keep at it, and definitely become stronger”

“But, but I...”

“I won’t betray you. Futaba-san, I’d never abandon you. I’m not asking you to believe me right now. Trust, is something you build together after all”

Was that a bit too pretentious? Certainly, I don’t believe I made any blatant lies. I truly believe that I, and only I, won’t abandon the good-for-nothing Futaba-san. Casting her away because she’s useless wouldn’t make me any different from them.

Nevertheless, that the possibility of me leaving her to run away by myself is one I can’t let go of, is again, true. No, depending on the situation, it’s pretty much a yes.

That’s why, in truth, there’s no conviction or meaning behind my words. People like Souma-kun or Tendou-kun could surely make these gutsy words their reality... but for a normal person like me they were baseless.

“U, uu... Momokawa-kun! Thankyou, thankyouuu!”

Yet, even that worthless gab had enough of an impact on Futaba-san to make her shout words of gratitude.

Too easy, or rather, hooked her right at the weak spot, I should say. Her face, layered in tears yet alit, sharply pricked at my heart.

“I’ll work hard! For Momokawa-kun, I’ll give it my everything!”

“A-appreciate it... So then, regardsyoroshiku Futaba-san”

“My vewy bess regaads too!”

Whatever way it may be, I succeeded in my plan of dragging Futaba-san into my party.

Chapter 14: Hero and Saint

“Vocation ‘Saint’ huh... Is that even a job?”

“Geez, don’t say that, it’s too embarrassing!”

Cheeks fuming in red, it’s the same old Sakura. I guess even receiving a ‘Vocation’, a supernatural power from the gods of this world, won’t change people all that much.

“And nii-san too, what indeed is up with that ‘Hero’ vocation of yours?”

“Hahaha, having is said to my face is pretty embarrassing too”

I had become a ‘Hero’ before I knew it. Don’t remember using that magic circle, but when my consciousness got floaty after getting a beatdown by the Armor Bear, I clearly remember hearing the voice of a Goddess.

“Mayst thou bring light to this world and become — the ‘Hero’.”

Is what the Goddess had said. I must’ve become a ‘Hero’ right at that moment.

“Sigh, forget saving the world, I wanna know if I can save ourselves”

“I for one would like a one-way ticket to Earth the moment we escape”

“Goes without saying, but why the harsh tone?”

“C’mon nii-san, you know you’re the type to dive straight into danger, saying things like the people of this world are in danger from monsters or something”

“I mean, if it’s in my power, I probably would”

“But, what happens when you keep fighting on and on? You could even get thrown into a war... that and bashing heads with punks back in Japan are on a completely different dimension”

I do realize. In this world the word ‘fight’ definitely implies one where both parties bet their lives. I can easily imagine what’s lying ahead if I kept fighting these harsh battles.

“Don’t worry. I’ll definitely get you, and everyone else out of this dungeon;

we'll get back to our world. I have my priorities straight”

“Alright, nii-san. But don’t try doing everything by yourself now. Thanks to this vocation, even I can fight”

“Yeah, you’re right, depending on you, Sakura”

I am already witness to Sakura’s powers as a ‘Saint’.

Now that we’re at a safe zone known as a ‘Fairy Square’, I think back on what Sakura means by her ability to fight. I have a deep impression that every one of her Skills are powerful.

There are 3 skills that come with a vocation

Holy EnchantKeeper

Grants the power of Light to any thing. Its brilliance disperses of the Light malevolence, and expels evil

Lux SagittaLight Arrow

Shoots an arrow of Light; a low grade attack of the light attribute

Healing LightGlow of Remedy

A restoration magic that combines both Heal and Cure

Those are the powers brandished by Sakura. Since we only perceive those brief descriptions, there’s no choice but to test them out to observe their effect.

And as for what Sakura demonstrated those powers against, it was those bone monsters that pop up in games: the Skeleton.

The first surprise was the output of ‘Lux Sagitta’. When Sakura pulls her archery club bow, an arrow of brilliant white light appears nocked there. And when she releases it, leaving a pristine streaks of light in the air, the arrow flies towards the Skeleton as if being sucked in.

Upon connection, the dazzling light bursts, leaving behind only the remains of crushed, dismantled bone.

It’s not like the bones of Skeleton are brittle. Having fought them myself, I can confirm their robustness. There are atleast as tough as those of human origin. They wouldn’t crack under trivial force.

Making those bones explode into bits says a lot about that output. I don’t

really want to imagine getting hit by that dead on.

Next on the list is 'Holy Enchant'. When Sakura let her hand hold my bokutou wooden sword, it flushed with a faint white glimmer; a few seconds later, and the enchantment was set. The bokutou consequently held a holy radiance.

Bashing a Skeleton with it during this shining state causes it's bony corpus to quickly crumble like sand.

Seems like Skeletons, as Undead, were super susceptible to the light attribute like in games, but I wonder if these kinds of weaknesses and corrections are being adjusted for in this world. Even without the advantage against Undead, I quickly understood after a few swings that this bokutou under 'Holy Enchant' was much sturdier than usual. It wouldn't give even if I banged it against a wall hard enough to definitely break in normal conditions.

There's a time limit on the effects, but it's not an issue if only used when required. As a result, I could suffice with my single bokutou. No need to help myself to the clubs carried by the Skeletons.

Finally, on 'Healing Light', since we haven't had any noticeable injuries, it hasn't been put to the test. The grievous injuries from the Armor Bear's assault were completely healed when I'd awoken as a Hero, and I've been without a scratch since.

Still, looking at these awe-inspiring feats of magic, we could expect the healing magic to be great too. And since we're traversing a dangerous dungeon that's crawling with monsters, this kind of recovery option is all the more indispensable. In a way, this healing magic can be considered much more valuable than attack power.

I'd hope we could break free from here not needing to use it, but considering that there's not only the small fry Skeletons, but powerful foes like the Armor Bear, I know it won't be that easy.

"...Sigh, this Fairy Walnut, it isn't bad per say, but it's kind of dispiriting that we'll have only these to go on from now"

"Don't be so picky. I think we're blessed enough to find a stable source of

nutrition in this kind of survival scenario”

“Maybe for you, nii-san, you’d be used to this from your extended trips to the mountain with jii-samagrand father.”

No, well even jii-san wouldn’t take me training to this kind of monster infested dungeon. Well, that jii-san might gladly dive into dungeon capturing, but I don’t see myself as that battle-hungry to begin with. I just wanna get back to regular old, peaceful highschooler life.

Leaving aside those thoughts, I finish up my walnuts, and stand up.

“Now then, I guess... we should check on that”

“Uu, nii-san, you’re really going to check that?”

Sakura openly makes a wry face, but we really can’t ignore this previous guest lodging in this Fairy Square.

“I mean look, it’s a dead Knight. And the sword’s still hanging at the waist... Isn’t this the best chance to get a weapon?”

This was a genuine skeletal corpse wearing slightly dirty armor. Like if they’d been attacked by monsters while exploring, and made it all the way here, but the wound was too deep and *etc.*

I’d prefer not to be like that in the future. May they rest in peaceNamu-amida-butsu, I leave a prayer for their passing.

“It won’t become a Skeleton and attack right?”

“Right now, I feel like I can deal with that unarmed”

It’s not as much as when I beat the Armor Bear with the light sword, but my body feels exceedingly light and overflowing with power. In fact, I’ve confirmed that my physical prowess has distinctly risen from the level I was at yesterday. Only, I didn’t need to go full power against Skeletons, so I can’t really tell exactly how strong I am.

“See, nothing to worry about”

That it’s showing no reaction as I rudely pick through its equipment shows, without a doubt, that the corpse is staying a corpse. I assure Sakura that it’s not

an Undead monster, but it's not right to expect a girl to happily engage in rummaging through a dead body. Reminds me, Sakura's a pretty easy scare. She's weak to horror films after all.

For now, ransacking duty's on me. First job would be taking the most eye-catching longsword off from the belt along with the scabbard. I unsheathe and examine the blade.

"This isn't, bad at all... a fine sword. No rust, and the make isn't shabby either"

"It does indeed look new. I wonder, if it's an effect from magic?"

Not implausible. The armor has a lightweight make, favoring maneuverability, but there are elaborate designs here and there; doesn't seem like it's for the common soldier. This sword too, has a coat of arms resembling a red lion, and doesn't seem like it was mass produced. Perhaps this person was a noble.

In that case, it wouldn't be strange if there was magic cast on this sword to maintain its edge. Though it's not like we have any way to confirm that.

"—Yup, this actually looks appropriate for battle"

"And much more reliable than a bokutou"

With a swing, I again affirm the splendor of the sword. Would've been the best if it was a katana, but I really can't be that fussy about it in another world. I should consider it lucky their norm wasn't some weird shaped sword like a Shotel.

"Sorry Knight-san, but I'll be gratefully using this"

Mostly, done with the scavenging, I once again place a hand on the skeleton of the Knight and say a prayer; following which, I equip the longsword to my waist.

The weapons I appropriated from the Knight are: this longsword, and a dagger they also possessed. The dagger was also well preserved, not a bit of rusting. Of course, it also had the same red lion coat of arms on it.

"Sakura, you hold on to the dagger, for self-defence"

"No, I'm... won't it be more useful if nii-san takes it?"

“‘Lux Sagitta’ is pretty dangerous at close range. Also, haven’t you taken lessons in handling a knife atleast?”

“Well, a bit, yes...”

Though not as hard as with me, Sakura has been more or less put through the ropes by jii-san since childhood. Not only self-defence techniques to deal with hoodlums carrying knives, but even the ways of taking those knives and stabbing back has been drilled into her. That jii-san said Sakura’s a girl, and it’s much easier to justify it as self-defence, so she should stab them to death without worry, really makes him a shitty old fart. Though, Sakura seriously asking him to teach her how to stab till they’re on the verge of death, is pretty something too.

“Well, let’s head out then. Sooner we find our classmates, the better”

And with our equipment ready, we left the Fairy Square.

What appeared in the area right after were the pitch black, short, humanoid monsters called ‘Goma’. Carrying rusted knives or axes, clubs as if stolen they’d stolen them from Skeletons, or spears made of animal bone, these were crude yet indeed armed, dangerous monsters. Even scarier was the fact that these things had a craving for human meat. On the off chance they beat us, they’d probably literally eat us alive.

The appearance is reminiscent of the representative mob monster in RPGs: the Goblin, but that’s no excuse to let our guard down.

“...Nii-san, wasn’t that, just a bit too much?”

“No wait, I can explain, Sakura, please hear me out”

Right now, spread around me was a scene so bloody and gruesome, you’d want to ask if some crazed mass murderer passed by.

When we exited the passage that we left the Fairy Square from, we came upon a slightly large path where 5 Goma attacked. Of course, we easily got the upper hand and beat them but... the killing was so brutal, even I’m a bit taken aback. The corpses were scattered and shred so bad, it’s hard to tell if there were 5 of them. At some point, priority went from how I’d attack to where I’d put my feet to avoid the blood spatter.

“Please, explain away”

“I was just trying out some Skills”

The disaster before me was nothing but the result of me testing the effects of my Skills. If I hadn’t done that, I’d have properly finished them with clean and efficient strikes of the Knights longsword.

“I see, that’s why nii-san’s movements started changing from normal. So, after using them, your impressions?”

“It’s got ridiculous power. Though it seems they’re called Martial Arts when release by a sword”

The Skills I learned after defeating the Armor Bear were in total 6.

Learned Skills

Thrust Boosts piercing potential. A sharp blow impales the enemy

Slash Boosts tearing potential. A sharp blow cuts the enemy

High Walk Boosts speed. Run like the wind

Acquired Skills

Force Boost Boosts strength. Force akin to the Armor Bear

Iron Guardiron
hide Boosts defence. Guard akin to the Armor Bear

Tri Slash 3 strike combo attack. Mutilate the enemy akin to the Armor Bear’s claws

Learned Skills are ones that apply to my own growth. In gaming terms, they’re skills that I automatically learn as I level up.

Acquired Skills would be ones that originate from defeated enemies. This probably doesn’t take the other party’s Skill as is, but takes that as a base and converts it into a form that a human like me can use. They had gone through the necessary corrections.

The Armor Bear's strength is a result of its own muscles, and its tough defence comes from that thick metallic shell. Of course, being able to maim the opponent with a swing of its arm is only thanks to the numerous sharp claws on its paws. If I was literally going to have the same powers as my foe, I'd have the same appearance as the Armor Bear by now.

"The power's ridiculous, but there some buildup time needed, and right after launching, there's a slight gap in my defence. They also drain more stamina than when normally swinging the sword, so I gotta consider the time and place."

"They're quite similar to magic. But these powers we get from the 'Vocation', we become more adept the more we use them, it seems, so I guess you can't be too sparing?"

"Yeah, if I can't get used to using these Martial Arts, they won't be useful when it actually counts. So for now, I'll be practicing"

But I'll refrain from bursting apart Goma with 'Tri Slash'.

"Nii-san, you kind of look like you're having fun"

"It may sound careless but... I wanted to get stronger. And now, we've come to another world, and I was given this great power you can even visually confirm. My excitement being high, is probably because of my lack of mental training"

"Sorry, I wasn't saying that cynically. I really do know how deeply nii-san feels about wanting strength. But what if this great 'power' changes you, is something I'm a bit, uneasy about..."

Damn, Sakura really had me there. Seems I got high tensioned enough to arouse this kind of worry. Really need to get a hold of myself. Maybe some Zen meditation later?

"I'm perfectly fine. Me getting as strong as I can is only because I want to protect you, Sakura, and everyone else too. I don't know why God made me a 'Hero' or how much stronger I can become but... I wouldn't stray from using that strength correctly, ever."

There's no use just having power. How you use it is the vital part. This

doctrine has been pummelled into me by jii-san since I was a kid. You could say, it's carved onto my bones by now.

I understand that. I meant to be aware of it since forever now. But now that I have the power to easily kill a human shaped thing, I feel like I gained a whole new apprehension of that teaching.

Or maybe I'll know it even better from now on; it would become something that keeps me in check.

"Just being protected, it's really vexing you know. So, I will get stronger with you. I'll try and get even a little stronger, so I can support you, nii-san"

"You will... Yeah, of course you will. Thanks, Sakura. Counting on you"

"Anytime, nii-san"

This excellent sister of mine thinking dearly of her brother, really does warm my heart... but huh, this heartwarming feeling doesn't match scenery of me in the middle of a slaughterfest at all. Atmosphere is pretty important.

Anyway, after a breather, we continued on the passage with no end in sight.

On the way, we got into a large domed space filled with vegetation like a botanical garden, where we encountered more Goma and packs of wild, reddish dogs. They were in packs, but there was no special powers or magic as a result of them being grouped, so with Sakura's support fire, and 'High Walk's' maneuverability, we easily eliminated them.

Up till now, the monsters were small fry. But there's no telling when a big shot with the Armor Bear would appear, so we made sure to be on maximum alert while advancing through the dungeon.

It was when we'd been in this place long enough to notice that the safe, relief stations known as Fairy Squares, were scattered at quite reasonable intervals. It was when we arrived at another one of those Fairy Squares.

"...No way, Souma-kun?"

There, we found the previous guests.

"Ah, it's true... Souma-kun, and Sakura-chan... I'm not in a dream, right?"

Familiar faces, there were 2 girls.

“Class rep and Natsukawa-san! What a relief, you’re both alright—”

“U, uu...uwaaaaa! Souma-kuun!”

“Wha! H-hold on, Natsukawa-san!?”

Suddenly hugging me in tears, I can’t do anything but get flustered. I’m just normal friends with Natsukawa-san, nothing on the level of embracing each other upon reuniting. And now’d be when Sakura misunderstands and looks at me coldly... is what I thought, but Sakura was facing class rep with a weighty expression.

“Ryouko, I hoped to say I’m glad you’re alright... but that, doesn’t really seem to be the case”

“Yeah, Sakura, and Yuuto-kun, we’re really saved now that you’re here. Thanks”

Apparently their situation was worse than I thought. Natsukawa-san too, it doesn’t seem like she’s crying from simple anxiety. I could see her having been mentally cornered at a severe level.

For now, I return the sobbing Natsukawa-san’s embrace to calm her down. And asking what happened, would be towards class rep who has an awfully tired and pale face, yet was still holding together.

“Class rep, what exactly, happened to you guys”

“... A friend, another one died. Just a while ago”

It was an event I hadn’t imagined... No, that’s wrong, I purposefully didn’t think about it. The powerful ‘Vocation’, the weak monsters that could only crowd together. So everyone else was fine too.

Naively, I made myself think like that.

That that kind of thinking was not hope, but merely a convenient desire, is proven fact, right here, right now.

Thus, I was finally made aware that among my classmates, there was a casualty.

Glorious japanese katana folded 1000 times vs boring western longsword,
also, Shotels.

Author's Q&A: Act.2

Now then, since the 2nd act has ended, I'd like to make some commentary.

More than half of this act was about the thrown away pig AKA Futaba-chan that Kotarou took pity on; but well, that wasn't something deviating from the direction of this work. Kotarou had been hit with the hat trick of the Armor Bear-san in the forest, the DQN Higuchi, and the traitor Masaru, and his body and soul were tattered, but the other classmates are having their share of trouble too, is what ended up being presented.

As this is a battle royale setting with even a class roster set up, I wanted to make sure to show that people other than the protag were also coming along in the dungeon and having things happen to them. Struggling through the dungeon, and then meeting a classmate, but will they be a friend or an enemy... these kinds of interpersonal relationships make up a big theme of the story.

Personally, the highlight of the 2nd act would be the scene where the class rep and Satou (female) are bickering over whether or not they would abandon Futaba-chan. Disregarding pleasantries and yielding to ruthless logic. That is what I wanted the climax to be.

Satou (female), who seemed to have the only role of hysterically asserting that they should just throw away that useless pig, was not exactly in the wrong. The class rep giving in to her opines only proved the fact. That they should have decided the allocation long before implicitly means that there was never going to be any herbs reserved for Futaba in the first place.

In that situation, class rep doing her best to be upstanding may be commendable as a person, but in a survival scenario, it only produces more conflict, and is kind of a pain for everyone. Still, being so heartfully stubborn is human, and Satou (female) easily saying heartless things is also human.

Being said outright, it sounds like a cliché, but still, I believe that is what makes it more fun as a story.

Now, the class rep has already had the vicious experience of abandoning a

classmate, but for the Hero AKA Souma Yuuto, how far would his own justice prevail? I only hope the reader can enjoy Kotarou's dungeon capturing antics, along with the turbulent interpersonal relationships between the classmates.

With that, we arrive at the Q&A corner

Q. Hell's a DQN?

A. In this work, or rather, in Kotarou's point of view, a DQN would be a character with bad behaviour, someone whose speech and conduct exhibit strong egotism, or someone whose appearance would suggest such mannerisms. Even if they are actually really nice on the inside, if they look punk-ish, he'd go "Yup, that's a DQN". I mean, he can't know what's inside.

Now, this question had strangely become the subject of great controversy in the comments section of the last activity report. It's originally internet slang so I understand there's no helping it if people don't agree on a strict definition, but I guess we can only take it as how we personally see it.

Q. Shiramine Academy is a college prep school, so how come there's delinquents?

A. It's a prep school that has delinquents. Both Higuchi and Tendou have legitimately passed the entrance exam, have been getting passing grades on their tests, don't have poor attendance, and managed to get into 2nd year11th grade.

I'm not going for realism. It's simply aa story that has them going to a college prep school, while at the same time, having a taste in delinquent fashion.

Tendou getting into so many fights but not getting expelled is... well, maybe he's just good at getting out of trouble? (lol)

Q. So the girl Kotarou saw getting eaten by Goma is...

A. It's Satou Aya.

Kotarou won't go thinking that that corpse was actually Satou Aya anytime soon, but in the end it'd be found out by process of elimination anyway; so I'm making it clear.

Q. Isn't the Hero a cheat?

A. I don't think so? This much power is pretty much guaranteed for a protagonist, in fact, isn't it unlucky for him he didn't get the strongest cheat as an other-world summoning bonus? Souma Yuuto-kun gets stronger with effort and tough battles, he doesn't rely on cheats and is a commendable Hero!

※ The protagonist of this story is Momokawa Kotarou

Q. Is it a contrast?

A. It is indeed a contrast.

I'm sure all the readers have long realized, but the activities of Kotarou and Souma Yuuto do in fact demonstrate a literary contrast. The first monster encounter is the Armor Bear for both. Kotarou somehow overcoming with wisdom, bravery and Red Shrooms vs. Souma Yuuto somehow suddenly using Hero powers to instakill.

Next, in the 2nd act, Kotarou made the useless, thrown-away pig Futaba his ally, and on the other side, even though he was already invincible against all the small fry he encountered, Souma Yuuto reconvened with the top-tier fighters, class rep and Natsukawa.

It's become a point where the power gap between the Kotarou and Souma Yuuto parties has magnified but... As outlined, Kotarou chasing after potential allies blessed with strength is also a theme of the story.

I would appreciate it if the reader cheers on Kotarou in hopes that, someday, he would catch up to Souma Yuuto.

Q. About the party compositions

A. It's random according to their starting location upon summoning. They wouldn't know who's nearby, but their destination would be the same, so naturally there are clashes. Having met with his sister early on would be Souma Yuuto's good luck, and the same goes for Futaba who met class rep before any monsters. Even Kotarou landed near, the though dead, Takashima-kun, and if he was alive, maybe they could've teamed up, it would be slightly easier on him.

Q. There's a lot of Fairy Squares

A. There are. There are the, so to speak, save-points. Though, it doesn't say if they can revive there.

They exist in multitudes in the vast dungeon, and are moderately placed to ease the process of advancing deeper. Basically, the standard dungeon capture tactic would be to depart from one Fairy Square aiming for the next one.

Q. Isn't pig a bit mean?

A. It's not. A heroine who can't fight is just a sow.

Q. Will the heroine go yandere?

A. A foolish question to me of all people. Of course she will. The heroine in this case would be the one connected to the protagonist, precluding female characters who act as heroines for other characters. Protagonist → Momokawa Kotarou will definitely have heroine(s) who will go yandere for him. Should Futaba-chan have the role of such a heroine, is something to be revealed in the coming chapters.

And that concludes that. If there's anything picking your interest, please feel free to leave a comment. I will (maybe) answer in the activity reports!